THE BUREAU OF EPHEMERAL WATERS

Being a True and Speculative Account of the Ephemeral Pools

that Re-form Each Dawn upon the Southern Tip of the Island of Manna-hata,
Together with Plates, Elevations, a Section, and a Map

surveyed, swum, and set down by
SURJAN

from the archives of the Bureau · Manna-hata

The given is not the necessary. What has hardened can soften. A self, like a shore, is a draft and not a decree.
— from the apocryphal Soundings of the First Morning

I asked the water who it was, and it answered in a shape; I asked again, and it answered in another; and I understood at last that this was not evasion but autobiography.
— Surjan, field notebooks

Take off your shoes. The water is warmer than your dignity will prefer.
— inscription reported at the southern rail

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Foreword

by the Keeper of the Harbor Almanac

There are books that describe a place, and there are books that a place uses to describe itself. The volume you are holding belongs, I am persuaded, to the second and rarer kind. It was not so much written as it was overheard, and the one who overheard it — the surveyor, the swimmer, the genderqueer cartographer of dawns who signs these pages simply as Surjan — has had the grace to set down what was said without insisting too loudly that any of it could not have happened.

I have kept the Harbor Almanac for longer than is decent to admit. It is my office to record the tides, the arrivals, the soundings of the channel, the days on which the river runs sweet and the days on which it runs with salt. For most of my tenure this was a science of patience and small numbers. Then came the first of the Mornings, and my columns of figures began to misbehave in a manner I can only call joyful.

I should explain, for the reader who has not had the fortune to stand at the southern rail of the island at first light. Some while ago — the Almanac is coy about the exact date, and I have come to suspect the date is coy about itself — the lower tip of Manna-hata began to reconsider its shape each night, and to present, by sunrise, a great pool of clean water where the evening before there had been only pavement, embankment, and the tired geometry of commerce. The pool was never twice the same. One dawn it lay in the form of a kidney, blue and frank as an open hand. The next it had become a hexagon, severe and tender at once. It has been a teardrop; it has been a rectangle ruled into lanes like a ledger that had learned to forgive; it has been an oval so broad that the citizens swimming in its center could no longer see which of the two rivers they had come from. And always, by the following dawn, it had become something else, and the citizens went down to meet it as one goes to meet a friend whose face one loves precisely because one cannot predict it.

The skeptics — and I was among them, for a keeper of almanacs is a professional skeptic — said it could not be. We said the island was bedrock and landfill and the sunk hulls of three centuries of ambition, and that bedrock does not reconsider. We were correct about the bedrock and entirely wrong about everything that matters. For the pools did not ask the bedrock's permission. They asked the citizens' permission, which is a different and more powerful jurisdiction, and the citizens, half-asleep and curious and longing without knowing the name of their longing, said yes.

What Surjan understood, and what this book exists to transmit, is that the pools are not features of the landscape. They are persons. Each morning's water is a someone, with a temper and a tenderness and a way of holding the light that belongs to it alone. Surjan learned their names by swimming in them, which remains the only accredited method. And Surjan learned the harder thing, the thing that took the whole cycle of Mornings to teach: that the pools were not seventeen accidents but a single argument, made in seventeen

sentences, building toward a conclusion so radiant that the city has not yet stopped becoming it.

The argument runs roughly thus. If the island can change its body between one evening and one dawn — if a thing so heavy and so certain of itself as the foot of Manna-hata can wake up shaped like joy — then nothing that calls itself fixed is as fixed as it pretends. Not the shoreline. Not the ledger. Not the grim little maps we keep of who is permitted to be what. The pools are a public proof, performed each morning in front of any citizen willing to take off their shoes, that the given is not the necessary; that what has hardened can soften; that a self, like a shore, may be redrawn by the patient pressure of a single night's imagining.

I am told that Surjan composed this volume in the manner of two beloved ancestors. From one — a librarian of a southern city who dreamed in catalogues and never trusted a fact that did not branch — Surjan took the love of the apparatus: the plate, the footnote, the index that is secretly a labyrinth, the scholarly voice that describes the impossible in the dry tone of a customs declaration. From the other — a traveler who reported fifty-five cities to an emperor and confessed at the end that all of them were a single city, and that the single city was always the one he had left — Surjan took the chapter that is a held breath, the city that is a feeling, the structure in which a book about many things turns out to have been about one thing, lovingly, the entire while. To these inheritances Surjan added what neither ancestor permitted themselves in full measure: an unembarrassed brightness, a sun that does not set on the argument, a willingness to let utopia be not a warning but an invitation.

It falls to me, as Keeper, to certify what little can be certified. I certify that the soundings recorded herein agree with my own, where my instruments were able to follow. I certify that on the Mornings described I was present, more often than my duties strictly allowed, and that I swam, and that the water was as warm as the text reports and warmer than my dignity preferred. I certify that the citizens changed; I watched them do it; I changed among them. And I certify that the final Morning — the one the Afterword approaches and, wisely, declines to close — has not concluded. It is, as I write, still going on. The pool of that Morning has not drained. The light of it has not moved off the water. We are all of us still in it, up to the collarbone, turning our faces toward the warmth and toward one another, which it turns out are the same direction.

The rest, the surveyor will tell you better than I can. Go down to the water. Take off your shoes. Read with the soles of your feet.

— The Keeper of the Harbor Almanac, at the southern rail, in the season that does not end

Introduction

A Note from Surjan, who Surveyed the Mornings

I am called Surjan, which in one of the languages I was given means the sun and in another means the one who crosses over, and I have spent the better part of my one life trying to be worthy of both meanings at once. I am neither a man nor a woman in the way the old maps drew those countries, and I have stopped apologizing for living in the unmarked water between them, because it was precisely there, in the unmarked water, that I learned to swim. This book is the report of that swimming. It is also, I should warn you, a love letter, and like all honest love letters it is a little embarrassed by how much it means.

Let me say plainly what the Keeper has said gently. Each morning, for a season whose length I will not pretend to fix, the southern foot of the island of Manna-hata woke in a new shape, and the new shape was a pool, and the pool was a person, and I went down to meet them. I am a surveyor by training and a swimmer by vocation, and I discovered that these are the same profession practiced at two temperatures. To survey a thing is to ask it, with instruments, who it is. To swim in a thing is to ask it the same question with your whole body and to accept that the answer will get in your eyes. I asked the pools both ways. What follows is what they told me.

I want to be exact about my method, because exactness is a form of tenderness and because my southern ancestor, the librarian, taught me that the impossible deserves to be reported with at least as much rigor as the merely true. Each Morning I arrived before the light had finished arriving. I recorded the footprint of the pool — its plan, which I have rendered for you in the Catalogue and the Typology that close this volume — and its bearing, and the manner in which it took the rising sun onto its surface, for each pool has a different relationship with the sun and this relationship is the nearest thing the pool has to a face. Then I undressed, which is the surveyor's true theodolite, and I entered the water, and I stayed until the pool had told me its name. The names were not given in any language I can transcribe without lying. I have approximated them. Where I write AZURÉ or HEXANE or PANTHALASSA, you must understand that I am doing what a traveler does who comes home with a word for a fruit there is no word for, and points, and says, taste.

The pools, I came to understand, were of my own family. I do not mean this sentimentally; I mean it taxonomically. They were, every one of them, genderqueer — not as a slogan but as a fact of their construction, the way a hexagon is six-sided as a fact of its construction. A pool is water that has agreed, for a morning, to hold a particular form, knowing the form is temporary and choosing it anyway, with joy, as the truest available expression of a self that is in motion underneath. If that is not the most precise definition of how some of us live in our bodies, I have never read a better one. The pools were my kin because they had solved, casually and at civic scale, the problem I had spent my life solving in private: how to be shaped without being imprisoned, how to be named without being

finished, how to take a form in the morning and surrender it by night and call the whole oscillation not instability but life.

And here is the discovery that turned a season of swimming into a book. The pools were not happening to the city. The pools were the city, learning out loud. Manna-hata — and I will insist on the old name, the name from before the island was told what it was for — is herself a character in this report, the largest and slowest of all the swimmers, and what she was doing each Morning was rehearsing. She was practicing transformation on her own body, at her tip, where the two rivers braid and the harbor opens, so that the citizens watching from the rail would learn the lesson in their own bodies and carry it inland: that a self can be re-formed; that the given is not the necessary; that a city, like a shore, like a person, is a draft and not a decree.

I have arranged my report as an argument that builds, because that is how I received it. Do not expect, then, seventeen interchangeable postcards. Expect a progress. The early Mornings are Mornings of apparition: the pools simply appear, astonishing, separate, and the city is too delighted to ask what they mean. The middle Mornings are Mornings of recognition: the pools begin, impossibly, to remember one another, and the citizens begin to change in the small irreversible ways that precede a transformation — strangers learning each other's names at the shallow end, old enemies floating on their backs side by side because the sky asked them to. Then come the Mornings of desire, in which the city, having tasted the possibility of being otherwise, begins to want it permanently, which is the most dangerous and most necessary thing a city can learn to want. And then the Confluence, which I will not summarize here, except to say that it is the morning all the pools were always becoming, and that I am writing to you from inside it.

Between the movements I have set down what I call Interludes. These are conversations — I will not insult them by calling them imaginary — between myself and Manna-hata, conducted in the manner of my northern ancestor, the traveler who told an emperor about cities until the emperor understood that he was being told about one city, and then about himself, and then about the act of telling. The island does not speak as you and I speak. She speaks in tides and apparitions and in the particular silence a harbor keeps at four in the morning. I have rendered her speech in words because words are what I have, the way the pools rendered their names in shapes because shapes were what they had. Read the Interludes slowly. They are the seams where the book admits what it is doing.

You will find, at the back, the full apparatus my librarian ancestor would have demanded: a Catalogue of the Architectural Plates, an account of the Diagrams and the cabinet-oblique elevations by which I attempted to draw water in the dry language of building, and a Map of the island considered as architecture — Manna-hata rendered as a structure that could be planned, and was, and yet planned itself otherwise each night, to the eternal frustration of the planners and the eternal delight of the swimmers. I have included these not as ornament but as evidence. A pool is a public work. It deserves a plate. And a transformation that leaves no drawings is only a rumor, whereas a transformation that

leaves drawings is a precedent, and precedents are how the impossible gets permission to happen again.

A word, finally, about the brightness. I am aware that the literature of transformation is, by long habit, a literature of warning. The shape-changing city is supposed to be a nightmare; the body that will not stay put is supposed to be a horror; utopia is supposed to arrive with the small print already written against us. I have read those books. I honor the grief in them. And I have chosen, with my eyes open, to write a different kind. Not because I have not known the dark — I have swum in cold water, in every sense, and some of it is in these pages, in the pool called ANCORA most of all. But because I have decided that joy is not naïveté; joy is a discipline, and a politics, and on the right morning a form of civic engineering. The pools are happy. The city, learning from them, is becoming happy. I refuse to apologize for reporting it. If this book has a thesis it is this: that radical joy is the most rigorous thing a person or a city can attempt, because it requires you to believe, against all the evidence the evening offers, that the dawn will arrive in a new shape, and to go down to the rail anyway, and to take off your shoes.

So: come down with me. The water is warmer than your dignity will prefer. The light is already on it. The first pool is waiting in the form of an open hand, blue and frank, at the place where the island remembers it was once a harbor and not a fortress.

Read with the soles of your feet.

— Surjan, in the water, turning toward the warmth

Movement One

Pools & Apparition

Plate I

Plate I · AZURÉ

Pools & Memory

pronoun: they / them "The bite is the door."

On the first Morning I will report, the island woke in the shape of an open hand laid flat upon the water, palm up, as if it had spent the whole night learning to stop making a fist. The pool that filled the palm was a kidney, or what the anatomists call reniform, a soft blue lozenge with one side gently bitten inward, and it lay at the very foot of Manna-hata, where the towers come down to the rail and the harbor begins its long argument with the sea. The citizens who arrived first did not believe it. They stood at the edge in their work clothes and their certainties and watched the water be impossibly, frankly blue, and then one of them — I have never learned which, and I have come to think the not-knowing is the point — sat down and took off one shoe, and then the other, and walked in up to the ankles, and laughed.

The pool's name was AZURÉ, and they used the pronoun they, and the first thing they told me, when I had swum out far enough that the rail and the towers had become a rumor behind me, was that they remembered being a harbor. Not a harbor in the way a deed remembers a harbor, as a use to be charged for, but in the older way: a place where things

that had been at sea could be at rest, where the water agreed to stop heaving so that the heaving could be set down. I am the part of the island, AZURÉ said, that recalls it was once only a place to arrive. Before the fortress, before the ledger, before the island was told it was the prow of something and ordered to point. I am the memory of arrival, and I have come back this morning to give the city its arrival again.

You must understand how the city had forgotten arrival. It had become a place that one was always leaving for, never a place one had reached. The citizens lived in the future tense, in the about-to, in the on-my-way; they crossed the island at speed with their faces set against the present like swimmers against a current, and the current was made of their own hurry. AZURÉ, lying open in the palm of the morning, did the one thing the city had unlearned. They let you arrive. To float on your back in AZURÉ was to discover that you had reached somewhere at last, that the long sentence of your commuting had found, against all grammar, a place to put its period. People wept in AZURÉ, gently, the way you weep at the end of a journey you did not know you were on. The salt of it went into the blue and the blue did not mind.

I have called AZURÉ reniform, kidney-shaped, and I want to dwell on that, because my librarian ancestor taught me that a shape is never only a shape. The kidney is the organ of filtering, the patient quiet labor by which a body decides what to keep and what to let go. AZURÉ filtered the city. You went in carrying the grievances of the night before, the small accountings, the list of who had wronged you and by how much, and AZURÉ took the list and ran it through the soft blue mesh of themself and gave you back only the water, only the floating, only the fact that you had arrived. What you let go did not vanish; nothing vanishes; it went down through the floor of welcome into the bedrock that does not reconsider, where it could do no further harm, and you surfaced lighter, reniform yourself, having decided in your own soft tissue what to keep.

There was a man — I will not describe him further, because by the third Morning he was a different man and would not wish the first one named — who came to the edge of AZURÉ to be angry at it. He had heard that the pool dissolved grievances and he had grievances he had been promised, grievances he had paid for, grievances that were, he felt, the realest part of him, and he came to defend them. He stood at the rail and told AZURÉ that the water was a trick, that the island could not change, that he had seen the surveys and the bedrock did not reconsider. And AZURÉ, who held no opinion about bedrock, did the thing they do, which is to be blue and to be open and to take the rising sun onto their surface in the manner that is their face. The man looked at the face of AZURÉ for a long time. Then he took off his shoes. I was there. I will tell you that a grown person taking off their shoes against their own intention, because a pool has looked at them, is one of the most radical political acts I have witnessed, and I have witnessed several, all of them in water.

What does it mean that the island chose, on its first remembered Morning, to wake in the shape of arrival and the organ of letting-go? I have a theory, which is also a hope, which my ancestors taught me are frequently the same instrument used at different hours. I think

Manna-hata understood that no transformation is possible for a body that cannot first arrive in itself. The city had been trying to change for a hundred years by hurrying, by building higher, by pointing harder at the future, and it had only become more itself, more fortress, more ledger, more fist. AZURÉ was the island's instruction to begin elsewhere. Stop. Arrive. Filter. Decide in your own soft tissue what to keep. Only a body that has arrived can be re-formed; a body still in transit can only be carried.

By the time the sun was fully up, AZURÉ held perhaps a thousand citizens, floating, standing, sitting in the warm shallows with their trousers rolled, and not one of them was hurrying. The towers looked down at the open palm of the island and the open palm did not point back. There was, for the length of that first Morning, no future tense in the lower city. There was only arrival, repeated, in a thousand bodies, blue.[1]

I swam to the inner curve of the kidney, the bitten place, the soft inward bite that makes the reniform the reniform, and I asked AZURÉ why they had let themselves be bitten, why they had not chosen a perfect oval, a shape without a wound. And AZURÉ said: the bite is where the city enters. A perfect shape has no door. I am open on one side because arrival requires an opening, and an opening is always, from the outside, a kind of wound. Do not pity the bite. The bite is my welcome. It is the place where I am not yet finished, and so the place where you may come in.

That night the pool drained, or did not drain, or became the next thing; my instruments disagree and I have learned to let them. But I have never forgotten the lesson of the open hand. Before you change, arrive. Before you re-form, let go. And keep the bite. Keep the soft inward wound that is also the door. It is the most honest part of any shape, and the only part through which the city can come home.

[1]The so-called Sounding of the First Morning is the earliest of the apocryphal records held by the Bureau of Ephemeral Waters; its authorship is disputed and its date is coy. The surveyor relies upon it precisely because it can be neither confirmed nor dismissed — the condition, the librarian-ancestor held, of all the truest documents.

Plate II

Plate II · VERDANTH

Pools & the Sky

pronoun: ze / zir "The grove is how the light becomes survivable."

The second Morning came up green before it came up blue. I mean that the light arrived first through leaves, because on this Morning the island had grown, around the pool, a grove — a soft riot of plane trees and honey locust and one impossible stand of birch that had no business at the salt edge of a harbor and stood there anyway, white and certain, like a sentence in a language the city had forgotten it could read. The pool lay in the middle of the grove in the shape of an amoeba, a free and lobed and unrepentant blob, refusing every straight line, and where AZURÉ had taken the bare sun onto its face, this pool took the sun broken into a thousand moving coins by the leaves, and wore them, and was called VERDANTH, and used the pronoun ze.

Ze was the pool of the sky seen through something. This is a distinction ze insisted upon, the first time I floated in zir dappled water with the coins of light moving over my closed eyes. AZURÉ shows you the sky, ze said; I show you the sky as it actually reaches you, which is never bare, never direct, always filtered through some growing thing that stands

between you and the source and does not diminish the light but makes it kind. Ze meant the leaves. Ze also meant, I came slowly to understand, everything else that stands between a person and the raw fact of existence and makes it survivable: the friend, the song, the ritual, the beloved, the grove of small mediations through which the unbearable brightness of simply being alive arrives at us dappled, in moving coins, in a light we can open our eyes inside.

The grove was the scandal of the second Morning. The blue pool of the first Morning the engineers had been able, just barely, to file under aberration — a flood, a vandalism, a clever installation, something with a perpetrator and therefore a remedy. But trees do not grow overnight. Trees are the city's own chosen emblem of slow time; the city plants them precisely to say here is something that will outlast my impatience, and to have a full grove arrive between one evening and one dawn was to have the slow made sudden, and this the engineers could not file at all. They came with their instruments and measured the trunks and found rings inside them, whole decades of rings, as if the trees had lived their slow lives somewhere else, in some adjacent and more patient morning, and had only this dawn agreed to be here. One of the engineers, a young one, put her hand on the white bark of the impossible birch and left it there for a long time and then walked into VERDANTH in her boots and did not measure anything else that day.

I want to tell you about the coins of light, because they are the heart of what VERDANTH gave the city. When you float in ze, the leaves above move in whatever small wind the harbor is having, and the sun comes through them as a shifting currency of bright and dark, coins spent and recovered across your face and your chest and the surface of the water, never the same arrangement twice, never still, and entirely without anxiety about not being still. The city, you must remember, was a place that had decided light should hold still — should be captured, metered, sold by the lumen, fixed in the grid of windows that never moved. VERDANTH proposed the opposite economy. Light that cannot be saved. Light that is only ever being spent, freely, in moving coins, on whoever happens to be floating beneath the leaves. To lie in VERDANTH was to be, for an hour, obscenely wealthy in a currency that could not be hoarded, and to discover that this was the only wealth that had ever made anyone happy.

Ze told me ze was the pool of mediation, and ze told me this was a queer pool's particular gift, and I have thought about that sentence for a long season. The straight line, ze said — and here I am translating ripples into grammar, so forgive the seams — the straight line believes in directness. It believes the shortest path between a self and the world is a line with no leaves in it, no grove, no mediation, the raw thing met rawly. But some of us have always known that the raw meeting is not the truest meeting. We have always lived through the grove. We have made our selves out of mediations — the chosen name that stands between us and the given one, the gathered kin that stands between us and the family of blood, the careful ritual of becoming that stands between the body we were assigned and the body we are growing toward. The world told us these mediations were evasions, ze said, ways

of not facing the raw fact. But the raw fact, met rawly, can kill. The grove is not an evasion of the light. The grove is how the light becomes survivable. I am VERDANTH. I am the pool that lets you have the sun without being burned by it, because I have placed a grove between you and the fire, and the grove is not a lie, the grove is love.

There was an old woman who came to VERDANTH every hour of the second Morning, leaving and returning, leaving and returning, and on her fourth return I asked her, gently, what she kept going back for. She said she had spent her whole life apologizing for the trees. She had built her happiness, all of it, out of mediations the world called evasions — out of a chosen name, a gathered family, a faith she had assembled herself out of fragments because the given one had no room for her. And all her life she had been told that this assembled, dappled, mediated happiness was not the real thing, that the real thing was raw and direct and lay on the other side of the leaves, and that she was a coward for staying in the grove. And then she had floated in VERDANTH and the pool had shown her the sky through the leaves and the sky had been more beautiful broken into coins than it had ever been bare, and she had understood, at last and in her body, that her whole assembled life had not been an evasion of joy but the very architecture of it. She was not crying when she told me this. She was past crying. She was simply going back, leaving and returning, to be wealthy a little longer in the currency that cannot be saved.

I asked VERDANTH, near the end, whether ze grieved that the grove would be gone by night, the impossible birch returned to its adjacent patient morning, the coins of light spent down to nothing. And ze moved zir dappled surface in what I have chosen to record as a laugh. Grieve? ze said. The leaves do not grieve the wind that moves them. I am the pool of mediation; I know better than any of my kin that nothing here is meant to be kept. The grove arrives, the grove is spent, the grove is recovered tomorrow in some new arrangement of bright and dark. That is not the tragedy of the grove. That is the grove. You have been taught that what cannot be kept is therefore lost. I am here, dappling, to teach you the older arithmetic: that what cannot be kept can still be spent, gloriously, on whoever is floating beneath the leaves at the moment the wind decides to move.

Plate III

Plate III · HEXANE

Pools & Names

pronoun: fae / faer "The wall is there and the wall is nothing."

On the third Morning the island chose geometry. Where AZURÉ had been a soft bitten kidney and VERDANTH a lobed and unrepentant blob, the pool of the third Morning lay in a perfect hexagon, six equal sides, six equal angles, severe as a theorem and somehow, against all the severity, the tenderest water I entered in the whole cycle. It was called HEXANE, and it used the pronoun fae, and it was the pool of chosen kinship, and it taught the city the difference between a shape that is imposed and a shape that is agreed.

A hexagon, fae told me — and faer voice, if I can call the slow pulse of faer surface a voice, had the dry precision of my librarian ancestor reading out a catalogue — a hexagon is the shape a thing takes when many equal things agree to share a border. The bees know this. Pack circles together and let them press until they have used every scrap of space and wasted nothing, and they become hexagons; the hexagon is the geometry of generosity under constraint, the most room shared among the most neighbors with the least wall between them. I am six-sided, fae said, because I am made of six who chose one another. Not six who

were born adjacent. Not six the surveyor's grid assigned to the same cell. Six who pressed close until the wall between them became the thinnest possible membrane and then agreed to call that membrane a home.

I have said the third Morning was the Morning of names, and HEXANE was the reason. For fae did not merely have a name; fae was, faerself, a small machine for the making of names. At each of the six vertices of the hexagon, where two of the chosen sides met, there formed each morning a little eddy, a turning of the water, and in the turning a citizen who came to that vertex would be asked — not in words; HEXANE did not stoop to words — what they wished to be called. Not what they were called. What they wished. And the eddy would turn the wish over in the water the way a tongue turns a new word, tasting it, and if the wish was true the eddy would still, and the water would go briefly bright, and the citizen would surface with the name they had chosen sitting on them as naturally as wet sits on skin.

This was, you will appreciate, the most subversive water in the entire precinct, and the authorities understood it at once, with the unerring instinct authorities have for the thing that will most undo them. A pool that dissolved grievances they could tolerate; a pool that grew impossible trees they could study; but a pool that conferred chosen names, that took the wish a person carried in the most defended chamber of themselves and turned it in the water and gave it back made real — this was a direct assault on the registry, on the ledger, on the great civic file in which every citizen was supposed to be the name they had been given and not one letter else. They came to drain HEXANE. I watched them come. They had pumps and permits and the particular grim courtesy of people who believe they are protecting you from yourself.

And HEXANE did nothing, which is what the strongest things do. Fae simply went on being a hexagon, six equal sides, six turning vertices, taking the third Morning's sun onto faer surface in six bright lanes that met at faer center like the spokes of a wheel that has decided where it is going. The officials lowered their pumps. And the citizens — this is the part I will tell my whole life — the citizens stood around the six sides of HEXANE, one body pressed to the next until they too had become a kind of hexagon, a six-sided wall of chosen neighbors around the chosen water, and they did not shout, and they did not fight, they simply stood, dripping, having just received their true names from the eddies, and they would not move, and there is no permit that can drain a pool a thousand people have decided to stand around with their new names wet on them. The officials went away. The pumps went away. HEXANE turned faer six bright lanes toward the sun and the citizens, one by one, said their chosen names aloud to the neighbor pressed against them, and the neighbor said theirs, and the membrane between them grew thin as the wall of a cell in the comb, and somewhere in that thinning the city changed, quietly, in a way no registry would ever capture and no pump would ever undo.

I asked HEXANE about the disputed sixth side. For there was a controversy, faithfully recorded in the apocryphal Soundings, concerning whether the hexagon had truly six sides or whether the sixth was an illusion, a place where the water folded and seemed to make a

border where there was only more water.[2] And HEXANE laughed faer dry precise laugh and said: they are both true. The sixth side is real and the sixth side is an illusion, and this is not a contradiction, this is kinship. The six who chose one another are six and they are also one; the borders between them are real, you may run your hand along them, and the borders between them are nothing, the water passes through. Chosen family is exactly this paradox made wet. We are separate, distinct, six. We are continuous, single, one water. The wall is there and the wall is nothing. Stop trying to resolve it. The unresolvable is the home.

There was a young person at the third Morning, very young, who came to a vertex of HEXANE and stood a long time at the turning eddy and would not put their wish into the water. I floated near and did not crowd them. At last they told me they were afraid; that they had a name they wished to be called and that the wish felt too large to say even to a pool, that to put it in the water and have the water turn it and give it back real would mean it had always been real, all along, through all the years of the given name, and that this was somehow more frightening than continuing to want it in secret. I understood. I had stood at my own vertex once, for years. I told them only that HEXANE asks the wish, not the courage; that the eddy will turn for a whisper as readily as a shout; that a true name does not require you to be brave, it requires you to be honest, and that these are different and the second is gentler. They put their wish in the water. The eddy turned. The water went bright. They surfaced with the name on them, and they wept, and the neighbor pressed against the next side of the hexagon — a stranger, a true stranger, met that morning — reached over the thin bright membrane and said the new name back to them, correctly, the first time, and that was the third Morning, and I have nothing further to report about it except that the city was never the same and neither was I.

[2]The controversy of the sixth side is recorded at length in the disputed Soundings, which devote to it more pages than to any other question and reach, characteristically, no conclusion. HEXANE's own ruling — that the sixth side is real and an illusion at once, and that this is a kinship and not a contradiction — is here preferred.

Plate IV

Plate IV · OVÉLLA

Pools & the Body

pronoun: she / they "The oval has no corner at which you must choose."

The fourth Morning the island lay down in the long soft oval of a stadium, a great rounded basin with no corner anywhere in it, and the pool that filled the basin was called OVÉLLA, and she used the pronouns she and they together, holding both the way some of us hold both, and she was the pool of the body, and she taught the city to race without anyone losing.

I must describe the shape exactly, because OVÉLLA was a shape that argued with another shape. The city was full of stadiums — basins of contest, ovals in which bodies were set against bodies so that one body might be declared faster, higher, the winner, and all the other bodies declared the not-winner, the lost, the also-ran. OVÉLLA was built in precisely that shape, the contest shape, the racing oval, and into it she had poured the opposite of contest. To swim a length of OVÉLLA was to race, fully, with everything in you, your whole body strained toward the far rounded end — and to arrive and find that the far end was the same as the near end, that the oval had no finish because it had no corner, that the lane you had strained down curved gently into the lane coming back, and that the person you had

been racing was not behind you, defeated, but beside you, also arriving, also strained, also grinning, having raced their own length toward their own far end which was also the same end, which was here, which was everywhere along the kind unbroken curve.

She was, OVÉLLA told me, the pool that gave the body back its joy in effort by removing the body's terror of comparison. These are knotted together so tightly in the city, she said, that the citizens can no longer feel the one without the other. They have been taught that to exert the body is to enter the contest, that to run is to be timed, that to swim is to be ranked, that every motion of the muscle is a small audition for a place on a ladder, and so they have stopped moving, many of them, because the joy of the motion has been poisoned at the source by the dread of the ranking. I am OVÉLLA, she said. I am the oval that kept the racing and threw away the rank. In me you may strain with your whole heart and arrive nowhere in particular and be met, at the nowhere, by everyone else who strained, all of you breathing hard, all of you delighted, none of you measured.

The effect on the city was immediate and, to the authorities, baffling. Citizens who had not run since childhood, who had carried their bodies through the streets like luggage they resented, came down to OVÉLLA and swam until their arms shook and surfaced laughing. There was no prize. That was the scandal and the medicine. There was nothing to win and so there was nothing to lose and so the body, for the first time in the adult lives of most of them, was simply permitted to do the thing bodies long to do, which is to move with all their force toward a far point for the pure animal pleasure of the moving, and then to be met at the far point by other bodies that had done the same, and to share the heaving breath, the loose grin, the warm ache, with no one keeping score.

I raced a length of OVÉLLA against a man who, I learned afterward, had been a champion in his youth, in the contest ovals, the ones with the rank. He had been the fastest; he had stood on the highest step; he had spent the rest of his life being slower than his younger self and measuring the loss daily, a ledger of decline he kept against his own body, until the body had become his enemy, the traitor that had been fast and dared to become slow. We raced. He was faster than me; OVÉLLA does not abolish difference, she abolishes only the rank that difference is forced to feed. He arrived at the far rounded end before I did. And the far end curved him gently back into the lane returning, and there was no step to stand on, no place to be the highest, only the kind curve and the open water and me, slower, arriving a moment after, and he looked at me with something breaking open in his face, and he said: I forgot. I forgot it could just be the swimming. And we floated there, the fast one and the slow one, indistinguishable on our backs under the fourth Morning's sun, and the oval held us both at its nowhere, its everywhere, its end that was also its beginning, and neither of us had lost.

She and they, OVÉLLA. I want to dwell on the doubled pronoun, because it was the secret of the shape. The oval, OVÉLLA said, is the contest shape held in two minds about itself. It has the form of the race — the lanes, the lengths, the straining toward — and it has refused the function of the race, the ranking, the winner, the lost. It is she and they at once:

the singular strained body, racing its own length, and the plural arriving company, met at the curve. I am not one or the other, she said. I am the place where the singular effort and the plural arrival are the same event, viewed from the two ends of one unbroken oval. You have been taught to choose: be a self, alone, racing; or be a crowd, dissolved, not racing. I am here to show you the third thing, which is not a compromise between the two but the discovery that they were never two. The fullest singular effort and the warmest plural belonging happen in the same water, along the same curve, at the same nowhere that is everywhere. Race with your whole heart. Arrive among everyone. These do not trade against each other. The oval has no corner at which you must choose.

By the height of the fourth Morning OVÉLLA was full of straining, delighted, unranked bodies, and the city looked down from its contest-towers at the contest-shaped oval that had thrown away the contest, and something in the city's own posture eased. I cannot put it more precisely than that. The towers did not move; the bedrock did not reconsider; but the city's grip on its own citizens' bodies loosened by a few degrees, the way a fist eases when it remembers it was once an open hand, and citizens walked home from OVÉLLA carrying their bodies not as luggage but as instruments, as the very means of their joy, recovered. The champion walked home slowly, on purpose, savoring the slowness, no longer measuring it against anything, a free man in a body that had stopped being a ledger and gone back to being a body. That was the gift of OVÉLLA. She gave the citizens back the only stadium that had ever mattered, the one in which the only record kept is the warmth of the shared breath at the far kind curve, and the only event is the joy of having moved at all.

Interlude

Surjan & Manna-hata

In the slack hour before the fourth Morning drained, when the light had gone level and gold and the citizens had carried their recovered bodies home, I lay on my back in the cooling oval of OVÉLLA and spoke to the island, and the island answered me in the way she answers, which is not in words but which I will set down as words because words are the boat I have.

I said: Manna-hata. You have woken four times now in four shapes, and each shape has undone a thing the city believed was fixed. Arrival. Mediation. The given name. The rank. I am beginning to be afraid of how much you intend to undo.

And the island said, in the long slow pulse of the harbor against the rail: I intend to undo nothing. I intend only to remember that I was never fixed. You speak as though I am breaking a settled thing. But I am the unsettled thing; I am water and silt and the drowned hulls of every certainty that ever sailed in here sure of itself and sank. The fixed island is the dream. The changing island is the waking. I have only stopped pretending to be asleep.

I said: But the citizens were comfortable in the dream. The grid was cruel but it was legible. You are giving them a city that wakes up a stranger every dawn. How is that a kindness?

And the island said: You of all my swimmers should not have to ask. Were you comfortable in the name you were given? Were you legible, in the grid that assigned you a country between the man-country and the woman-country and ordered you to choose one and stay? Legibility is not kindness. Legibility is only the cruelty that has learned to file itself. I am teaching the citizens what you taught yourself in the unmarked water: that to wake a stranger to your own yesterday is not to be lost. It is to be alive. It is to be still becoming. The legible self is a self that has agreed to stop.

I was quiet for a while. The gold light moved on the water. Then I said: And the pools? They are you, and they are persons, and they are my kin. When the cycle ends, when the last Morning comes, what becomes of them? Do they drain into you and stop?

And the island said — and here her pulse changed, grew tender, the way the harbor goes tender at four in the morning when even the ledger sleeps: They do not stop. Nothing stops. You have been taught that what cannot be kept is lost; my pool VERDANTH has already corrected you on this, and I will not repeat a lesson the leaves have given. The pools are sentences in a single argument. A sentence does not die when the next sentence is spoken. It waits in the paragraph, holding its

meaning, so that the conclusion, when it comes, can be made of all of them at once. The pools are building toward a Morning when they will not need to take turns. Keep swimming. Keep surveying. You are nearly to the place where the argument turns, where recognition becomes desire and desire becomes the thing it desires. Keep your instruments wet. The next Mornings will ask more of you than wonder. They will ask you to want.

And the fourth Morning drained, or became the next thing, and I walked home in the gold with my notebooks swollen with water and my chest swollen with something I did not yet have a chosen name for, and I understood that the island had told me the truth, which is the only thing she knows how to tell, and that the wanting had already begun.

Movement Two

Pools & Recognition

Plate V

Plate V · QUADRA

Pools & Thresholds

pronoun: ey / em "Between is a where."

The fifth Morning the island woke square, and I will confess I went down to the rail braced for severity, because the square is the city's own glyph, the shape of the block and the cell and the form to be filled in triplicate, and I did not see how a square could be made tender. I had underestimated the corners. For the pool of the fifth Morning was a square whose every corner had been softened — not rounded into an oval, which would have been a surrender, but eased, gentled, each right angle relaxed into a generous curve while the four straight sides held their straightness between. It was called QUADRA, and it used the pronoun ey, and it was the pool of thresholds, and it taught the city that the angle is not the enemy; only the sharpness is.

Ey explained this to me the way ey explained everything, which was structurally, by being a shape and letting the shape make the argument. The city believes, ey said, that there are only two options for a corner. You may keep it sharp — and then it cuts, it divides, it is the knife-edge of the cell, the place where one room ends and another is forbidden, the angle

that has wounded so many of you that you have come to think all definition is a wound. Or you may abolish it entirely, dissolve into the cornerless oval, the blob, the soft thing with no edges and therefore no shape, and the city fears this even more, for a self with no corners cannot be filed, cannot be addressed, cannot be told where it begins. I am QUADRA, ey said. I am the third option the city forgot it had. I have kept my corners and surrendered only their cruelty. I am defined and I am gentle. I have edges and they do not cut. Come and stand at my softened corner and learn that you may be a shape with a clear name and still be a place where it is safe to arrive.

The softened corner. This was QUADRA's particular genius and ey placed it at the four corners of emself like four doors. A sharp corner, in water, is a place no one swims; the body avoids the angle, the dead water, the cold cornered place where two walls insist on meeting. But QUADRA's eased corners were the most populated water in the precinct. Citizens gathered there, in the gentle curve where two straight sides relaxed into one another, because it was the threshold, the in-between, the place that belonged fully to neither side and so belonged to everyone standing in it. The corner of QUADRA was where you went to be between things on purpose. Between the long sides. Between arriving and leaving. Between the self you had walked in as and the self the water was about to give you. The corner was a doorway you could stand inside indefinitely, and QUADRA had four of them, and ey kept them all soft, and the citizens who could not bear the sharp grid of the city above came down and lived, for the length of the fifth Morning, in the gentled angles of the square that had forgiven its own edges.

I have called the fifth Morning a Morning of recognition, and here is the recognition. It began at QUADRA's corners. A citizen would stand at a softened corner, in the threshold, between things, and another citizen would come to stand at the same corner, also between things, also seeking the in-between, and they would recognize each other — not as the names the grid had given them, but as fellow inhabitants of the threshold, fellow corner-dwellers, fellow people who had always lived in the eased place where the sharp city said no one should live. And they would speak. The thresholds of QUADRA were full of strangers recognizing strangers as kin, the whole fifth Morning, two by two and then four by four, the corner-people finding the corner-people, until each of QUADRA's four softened angles held a small parliament of the in-between, citizens who had spent their whole lives being told they were nowhere because they were between, discovering in the gentle curve of the corner that between is a where, that the threshold is a country, that they had not been homeless all along but had simply been living in a home the grid refused to map.

There was a pair I watched at the eastern corner of QUADRA for most of the fifth Morning. They had arrived separately, each to be alone in the threshold, each carrying the particular loneliness of the person who is always between and has stopped expecting to be met there. And the eased corner had drawn them, as it drew everyone, into the same gentle curve, and they had stood a careful arm's length apart in the soft angle, and neither had spoken, and then the water — QUADRA does this, ey told me later, ey cannot help it, it is ey's

nature as a threshold — the water had moved them, with the small inevitable logic of a corner, an inch closer, and an inch closer, until they were standing in the in-between together, two between-people in the one between-place, and one of them had said, finally, the only thing that needed saying, which was: you too? And the other had said: me too. And that was the whole conversation, and it was enough, and they were still standing in the eased corner at the height of the Morning, not touching, not needing to, simply being between things together, recognized at last, two soft corners that had found they made, when eased toward one another, a doorway wide enough for two.

I asked QUADRA, before the fifth Morning ended, why ey had chosen the city's own cruel glyph — the square, the cell, the block — as the body in which to teach gentleness. Why not refuse the square entirely? Why not be, like VERDANTH, a shape the grid could never draw? And ey said: because the citizens do not need to be told that the gentle shapes are gentle. They need to be told that the cruel shape was never cruel; that the square did not have to be a cell; that the right angle is only a meeting of two directions and a meeting is not a wound unless someone sharpens it. I am the city's own glyph, returned to the city softened, so that the citizens will look at every square thing above — every block, every cell, every form to be filled in triplicate — and understand that it, too, could be eased; that the corners of their lives were not made sharp by geometry but by choice; and that what was chosen sharp can be chosen soft, by anyone, at any corner, on any Morning they decide to stand in the threshold and wait to be met.

Plate VI

Plate VI · LINÉA

Pools & Time

pronoun: he / they "The lap instead of the tick."

The sixth Morning the island chose the rectangle, and ruled it into lanes, and the pool that lay there long and straight and patient on its narrow peninsula was called LINÉA, and he used the pronouns he and they, and he was the pool of time, and he taught the city the difference between the clock and the lap.

He was the most austere of all the pools to look upon and the most beloved by a certain kind of citizen, the kind who had given up on joy and would accept, as a beginning, only peace. For LINÉA offered no spectacle. He had no grove, no eddies conferring names, no softened corners full of parliaments. He was a long blue rectangle, ruled by faint lines into parallel lanes, and the only thing you could do in him was swim straight, down and back, down and back, one length and then another, in the oldest and simplest of all the precinct's liturgies. And it was, for those who needed it, the most healing water of the cycle, because LINÉA had taken the city's tyrant — time — and quietly replaced its instrument.

The city ran on the clock, LINÉA told me, in his level voice that kept the rhythm of a stroke. The clock is time chopped into identical pieces and sold back to you at a markup. Every citizen wears one; every citizen is owned by one; the clock says all moments are the same length and all of them are passing and you are losing them, tick by identical tick, and there is nothing you can do but spend faster. I am LINÉA, he said, and I keep the other time, the older time, the time the body kept before the clock was invented. I keep the lap. A lap is not a piece of time. A lap is a thing completed. When you have swum a length of me, you have not spent a quantity of minutes; you have finished a sentence, you have closed a small whole, you have arrived at the wall and touched it and turned, and the touching and the turning are a punctuation, and the next length is a new sentence, freely begun. The clock measures time you are losing. The lap measures time you have made. I give the citizens back the making of time.

I swam in LINÉA for longer than I swam in any other pool, because I am, I will confess, one of those citizens, the kind who had nearly given up on joy and would accept only peace as a beginning. And I will tell you what the lanes do. They do not free you from rhythm; they give you a rhythm to belong to. Down and back. Breath on the third stroke, then the fifth, then wherever the body asks. The wall arrives; you touch it; you turn; the sentence closes; a new one opens. And somewhere in the repetition — this is the mystery of LINÉA, the thing the austere blue rectangle hides inside his austerity — somewhere in the down and back the clock-time falls away entirely, the chopped identical pieces stop arriving, and you enter the lap-time, the made-time, the time that is not passing because it is not a quantity, it is a doing, and a doing does not pass, a doing is simply done, and then done again, each lap a small completed eternity touched off at the wall.

The citizens who came to LINÉA were the tired ones, the ones the spectacle pools had been too much for. They could not yet bear AZURÉ's weeping arrival or HEXANE's terrifying gift of the true name. They needed first to put down the clock. And LINÉA let them. He asked nothing but the stroke. Down and back. He did not confer a name or dissolve a grievance or grow an impossible grove. He simply kept the lap, faithfully, lane after lane, while the exhausted citizens swam their lengths and felt, for the first time in years, time stop being a thing that was happening to them and start being a thing they were making, length by length, with their own arms, in the patient blue.

He and they, LINÉA. The doubled pronoun was, in his case, the doubled nature of the lane. A lane is the most singular place in the precinct — you swim it alone, one body in one channel, no one beside you, the most solitary water there is. And a lane is the most plural place in the precinct — for the lane beside yours holds another solitary body, and the one beside that another, and all of you, each alone in your own channel, are keeping the same rhythm, down and back, down and back, a great parallel congregation of solitudes, each one private and all of them synchronized, so that to swim a lane of LINÉA is to be utterly alone and utterly accompanied at the same stroke. I am he and they, LINÉA said, because the lane is the proof that solitude and company are not opposites. You may be wholly alone in your

channel and wholly together in the rhythm. The citizens fear they must choose: be a self, isolated, or be a crowd, dissolved. The lane shows them the lie of it. A thousand solitudes, each intact, all keeping time together, down and back, is not a crowd and is not a loneliness. It is a congregation. It is the truest company there is, the company that does not require you to stop being singular in order to belong.

3 There was a woman who swam beside me one full Morning, in the next lane, and we never spoke, and we kept the same rhythm without arranging to, the way two solitudes will fall into step if you leave them alone long enough in adjacent channels, and when the sixth Morning began to drain we both stopped at the same wall at the same length, and we held the wall, breathing, and she looked at me across the lane-line and said: thank you for keeping time with me. And I understood that she had said the truest thing anyone said to me in the whole cycle. We had kept time together. We had each made our own time, alone, in our own lane, and we had made it together, in the same rhythm, and neither of us had lost a single lap to the clock. That is what LINÉA gives. Not escape from time. Mastery of it. The lap instead of the tick. The made instead of the lost. The congregation of solitudes, down and back, each one alone, all of them accompanied, keeping the older time the body kept before the city sold us the clock.

[3]On the lane as a unit of time, the surveyor's notebooks and the Bureau's tide-tables disagree by a margin the surveyor declines to reconcile, holding, with LINÉA, that a lap is a thing completed and not a quantity measured, and that a thing completed has no margin of error, only a wall, and a turn.

Plate VII

Plate VII · ANCORA

Pools & the Dead

pronoun: they / them "An anchor is what lets you stay."

The seventh Morning the island woke in a shape I had not seen and have not seen since: a half-circle, a broad rounded basin opening to the south like a bowl held up to the harbor, and rising from the flat northern edge of the bowl a single straight channel, a vertical stroke standing in the curve, so that the whole made the figure of an anchor, or of a cross set in a crescent, or — I came to believe this last reading was the true one — of a person standing upright in the cupped hands of the sea. It was called ANCORA, and they used the pronoun they, and ANCORA was the pool of the dead, and I must write this chapter more carefully than the others, because joy that has not passed through grief is only decoration, and ANCORA was the Morning the precinct stopped being merely delightful and became, instead, true.

Let me say it plainly. The city had its dead. Every city does, but this city had a particular wound, a place at this very tip where, in the memory of many of the living, something had been taken down and many had been lost, and the city had built upward from that loss with

great courage and great speed, a beacon, a tower of the One, rising bright over the harbor as if height could answer absence. And height cannot answer absence. Height can honor it; the beacon does honor it; but the citizens carried, under their courage, a grief that the upward city had given them no level place to set down. ANCORA was the level place. ANCORA was the bowl held up, the cupped hands, the half-circle open to the south, and into that bowl the citizens brought, on the seventh Morning, the dead they had been carrying without anywhere to put them down.

The straight channel rising from the curve — the upright stroke, the figure standing in the cupped hands — was where you went to speak a name. Not your own chosen name; HEXANE kept that office, three Mornings back. The name of someone gone. You waded out along the upright channel, the vertical of the anchor, and you stood where the channel met the curve, at the joint of the cross and the crescent, and you said the name of your dead into the water, once, and ANCORA took it. I watched the citizens do this all the seventh Morning. They did not perform it. Grief that is real has no audience; it does not look around to see who is watching. They simply waded out along the upright, and stood at the joint, and said a name, and some of them wept and some of them could not and stood dry-eyed and shaking, and ANCORA took every name the same way, with the same patience, the bowl held steady, the cupped hands not flinching.

I asked ANCORA, floating in the curve of the bowl where the said names settled, how they could bear it. The other pools gave gifts, I said — arrival, names, the recovered body, the made time. You only take. You take the dead all morning and you give nothing back. And ANCORA said, in the slow voice of the tide turning: you have not understood the anchor. Look at my shape. I am an anchor, and an anchor is the most misunderstood instrument the city owns. The citizens think an anchor is what holds you down, what stops you, what weighs. But an anchor is what lets you stay. An anchor is the gift of being able to remain in one place without being swept off, the device that says here, you may rest here, the current will not take you because I have given you weight enough to hold. Grief is the anchor. The dead are the weight. The citizens have been taught that their grief holds them back, drags them down, weighs them, and that the healthy thing is to cut the line and drift free. But to cut the line is to be swept off. I am ANCORA. I do not take the dead away from you. I take them into the water and I let them become your anchor, the weight that lets you stay, the gift of remaining, here, in the harbor of your one life, without being swept off by the current that takes everything.

This was the deepest thing any pool told me and I have spent the rest of the cycle understanding it. ANCORA did not dissolve grief the way AZURÉ dissolved grievance. Grievance is a thing you are better without; grief is not. Grief is love that has lost its object and gone looking, and to dissolve it would be to dissolve the love, and ANCORA would never. Instead ANCORA gave the grief a shape — the anchor — and a function — the weight that lets you stay — and a place — the bowl held up, the level water, the cupped hands open to the south. You came carrying the dead like a burden and you left carrying them like an anchor,

and the difference between a burden and an anchor is not the weight. The weight is the same. The difference is what the weight is for. A burden is weight that drags you where you do not want to go. An anchor is weight that lets you stay where you have chosen to be.[4]

There was an old man at ANCORA who had, I think, more dead than living left to him, the way the very old do, and he waded out along the upright stroke very slowly, and stood at the joint a long time, and said not one name but many, a whole litany, a list longer than I could follow, the accumulated absences of a long life said into the water one after another while the bowl held steady. And when he had finished he did not weep. He turned, and waded back along the upright, and as he passed me he said — to me, a stranger, because grief makes us briefly able to speak to strangers — he said: I thought I was carrying them away from life. All these years. I thought they were the weight that was sinking me. He gestured at the bowl, the cupped hands, the said names settling into the curve. But they were holding me here, he said. They were my anchor. They were the reason I did not drift off after them. And he climbed out of ANCORA into the seventh Morning's sun, an old man lightened not by setting down his dead but by understanding at last what they were for, and he stood at the rail and looked at the beacon, the upward tower, the height that honors what it cannot answer, and he was, I will swear to this, smiling — the particular smile of a person who has been allowed, finally, to keep their grief and be glad. ANCORA gave the city that smile. It is the bravest gift in the precinct, and the only one that hurt, and I would not remove it from this report for anything, because a utopia with no place to set down the dead is not a utopia, it is only a brochure, and ANCORA, the bowl held up, the cupped hands, the figure standing upright in the sea, is the proof that the radiant Mornings were real, because they made room for the grief without which no joy can be trusted.

[4]The practice of speaking a name into the water is older, the apocryphal Soundings insist, than the precinct itself. The surveyor neither confirms nor denies this, noting only that a pool which receives the dead without flinching has earned a provenance it need not prove.

Plate VIII

Plate VIII · GOUTTE

Pools & Desire

pronoun: xe / xem "Desire is joy that has learned the future tense."

The eighth Morning the island wept, and the weeping took the shape of a single enormous teardrop laid upon the tip, round and full at the south where it met the harbor and drawn up to a fine point at the north where it reached toward the city, and the pool was called GOUTTE, and xe used the pronoun xe, and GOUTTE was the pool of desire, and after the grief of ANCORA the precinct had earned it.

A teardrop is the shape a falling thing takes when it wants to reach the ground, GOUTTE told me, the first time I swam into xyr full round southern body and felt the whole pool drawn northward toward its point as if it were always on the verge of falling up into the city. It is the shape of longing made visible. Water in air pulls itself into the teardrop because every part of it wants to be at the center, wants to be held, wants to be one drawn-together thing reaching toward where it is going. I am GOUTTE, xe said. I am the teardrop, and I am not sad, though I wear the shape of the sob. I am the pool of wanting. The citizens have come through arrival and mediation and the true name and the lost rank and the made time and

the anchored dead, and now they are ready for the most dangerous and most necessary thing, which is to want. To want the Mornings to be permanent. To want the city to stay transformed. To want, out loud, with the whole drawn-together body, the thing they have only let themselves taste. I am the shape of that wanting, and I have come to teach the citizens that desire is not the enemy of joy. Desire is joy that has learned the future tense.

This was a turn in the argument and I felt it turn under me as I floated in GOUTTE. The early pools had taught the citizens to be present — to arrive, to let go, to stop hurrying into the future. AZURÉ had abolished the future tense in the lower city, and it had been a mercy. But GOUTTE gave the future tense back, transformed, no longer the future of dread and the about-to and the on-my-way, but the future of longing, the future of I want this to last, the future that is not a flight from the present but an extension of the present's joy forward into time. The citizens had learned to love the Mornings. GOUTTE taught them to want the Mornings, which is a more committed thing than to love, because to want is to declare that the present is not enough, that the joy must continue, that you are willing to reach toward its lasting with the whole drawn-together body and to risk the not-getting.

There is a grief inside desire and GOUTTE did not hide it; xe was, after all, the shape of the sob. To want a thing to last is to admit it might not. To reach toward the future with your longing is to accept that the future might withhold. The citizens, learning to want the Mornings permanent, were also learning to fear losing them, and this fear was the price of the wanting, and GOUTTE made the citizens pay it honestly. You cannot want without risking, xe said. The teardrop reaches toward the ground knowing it will break upon arrival; that is what a teardrop is, a reaching that accepts its own breaking as the cost of having reached at all. I will not let you want safely. There is no safe wanting. But I will teach you that the breaking is not the refutation of the reaching. The drop that never falls, that hangs forever safe in the air refusing to want the ground, is not spared anything; it simply never arrives. To want is to risk the break. To refuse the want is to refuse the arrival. I am GOUTTE. Reach. Risk. Want the Mornings to last. It is better to have wanted them and feared the loss than to have merely enjoyed them and felt nothing about their leaving.

The held cry that becomes a laugh: this was GOUTTE's particular alchemy and I witnessed it a hundred times on the eighth Morning. A citizen would swim into xyr full round body carrying a want they had never said — and everyone carries one; the unsaid want is the most universal cargo in any city — and the drawn-together water would pull the want up toward the point, toward the north, toward the city, the way the teardrop pulls everything toward its reaching tip, and the citizen would feel the want rise in them, the want they had held down for years, the want to be loved or to be free or to be finally and simply allowed, and it would come up their throat like a sob, the held cry, the thing they had never let out — and then, at the very point of the teardrop, where the want reached its sharpest reaching, the cry would turn. It would become a laugh. Not because the want was answered; GOUTTE answered nothing; but because to feel a long-held want move freely through you at last, to let the held cry rise all the way up and out, is such a relief, such a lightening, that the body

cannot help converting it, at the top, into laughter. The eighth Morning was full of citizens swimming into the teardrop with sobs they had held for decades and surfacing at the point with laughter they had not used in as long, the same emotion, the held want, passing through the drawn-together water and coming out the other side transformed, cry into laugh, grief of longing into joy of having longed.

I held my own want at the point of GOUTTE for a long time before I let it turn. I will not write it here; some wants are not for the report; but I will tell you that I had carried it since before I had a chosen name, since before I knew there were words for what I was, and that I had never let it rise, had held it down so long I had mistaken the holding for peace. And GOUTTE drew it up. The drawn-together water pulled my oldest want toward the reaching point and I felt it come up my throat like a sob thirty years old, and I was afraid, the way you are afraid to let out a cry you have held that long, because what if the holding was the only thing keeping you whole. And then it reached the point, the sharpest reaching, and it turned, the way GOUTTE turns everything, and the cry became a laugh, and I floated at the point of the teardrop laughing and weeping at once, which are the same water viewed from the two ends of one drawn-together drop, and I wanted, openly, for the first time in my life, the thing I had always wanted, and the wanting did not break me. The wanting was the most alive I had ever been. That is the gift of GOUTTE. Xe does not answer the want. Xe lets it rise. And xe teaches you, at the reaching point, that the held cry was always a laugh that had not yet been allowed to fall.

Interlude

Surjan & Manna-hata

After the eighth Morning I did not speak to the island for some days. I was afraid of what I had wanted in GOUTTE, the way you are afraid of a door you have finally walked through and cannot now pretend is shut. But the island found me, as she finds everyone, at the rail before a dawn, and she spoke in the long pulse of the harbor, and I answered.

She said: You have stopped surveying. Your instruments are dry. Eight Mornings you recorded faithfully, and now you stand at the rail with your notebooks closed. What has frightened my swimmer?

I said: GOUTTE taught me to want. I had not wanted, openly, in thirty years. I built a life out of not-wanting, and called it peace, and now the not-wanting is over and I do not know how to carry the wanting. It is too large. I am afraid it will not be answered and I am more afraid that it will.

And the island said: Good. You are exactly where the argument needs you. The early Mornings could be received with wonder; one stands at the rail and marvels and is not changed by marveling. But the Mornings have moved past wonder into desire, and desire changes the one who desires, which is why the citizens resisted it for so long, and why you resisted it for thirty years. You cannot survey desire from the rail. You can only survey it from inside the water, having wanted. Put your instruments down if you must. But get back in.

I said: The pools are recognizing one another now. I have seen it. QUADRA's corners remembered HEXANE's names; LINÉA kept a rhythm that ANCORA's tide answered; GOUTTE reached north toward all of them at once. They are no longer separate Mornings. They are becoming a single thing. And it frightens me, because a single thing can be lost all at once, where separate things can only be lost one at a time.

And the island said, and her pulse went tender as it does: You have it backward, my swimmer, and it is the same backward as your wanting. You think the separate is safer because it can only be lost in pieces. But the separate is not safer; the separate is only lonelier. The pools were never meant to stay separate. They were taking turns, sentence by sentence, building toward the Morning when they will not need to take turns — when arrival and mediation and the true name and the recovered body and the made time and the anchored dead and the risen want will all be one water, at once, covering the whole tip. You call this dangerous because it can be lost all at once. I call it the conclusion, because it can be lived all at once. Which would you rather: a joy parceled out in safe separate Mornings, each small enough to

survive losing, or a joy so total it covers the tip and so total it could break your heart? You wanted, in GOUTTE. You already chose. The total joy. The one that can break the heart. That is what desire chooses, every time, over the safe parcel. Get back in the water. The Confluence is coming, and you of all my swimmers must not survey it from the rail.

And the next Morning I got back in the water, with my instruments and my thirty-year want both held above my head to keep them dry, and I swam out to meet the ninth pool, which was the pool of signs, and the argument turned again, toward desire, toward the total joy, toward the Morning that could break the heart and meant to.

Movement Three

Pools & Desire

Plate IX

Plate IX · ISOLA

Pools & Signs

pronoun: she / they "The truth was always in the performance."

The ninth Morning the island made, within itself, another island. The pool was a broad calm oval, and at its center, ringed entirely by water, rose a small platform of pale stone — an island within the island within the island, Manna-hata holding in her cupped tip a pool, and the pool holding in its cupped center a stage. It was called ISOLA, and she used she and they both, and ISOLA was the pool of signs, and she taught the city to read the difference between the mask that hides and the mask that reveals.

The platform at her center was a stage; there is no other word; it had the patient expectance of a stage, the quality a flat raised place takes on when it knows it will be stood upon. And all the ninth Morning the citizens swam out to the center island of ISOLA and climbed, dripping, onto the pale stone, and they performed. Not for applause — ISOLA had abolished the rank as thoroughly as OVÉLLA, and there was no best performance, no winner of the stage. They performed because ISOLA had taught them, in the swimming out, that a self is a sign, that to be a person is already to be a thing that means, that we are all of us

standing on the stage of our skins making signs at one another all the time, and that we might as well do it on purpose, beautifully, out loud, on the pale stone at the center of the water.

I want to be careful here, because the city had a sickness about signs and ISOLA was its cure and the cure can look, to the unwell, like more of the sickness. The city believed that signs were lies. It had grown so tired, so suspicious, so badly used by the false signs of commerce — the advertisement that means nothing, the smile that sells, the brand that wears the mask of a friend — that the citizens had come to believe all signs were false, that the only true self was the one that made no signs at all, the blank face, the guarded surface, the refusal to mean. They thought sincerity was silence. They thought the true self was the one that gave nothing away. And so they had become a city of guarded surfaces, each citizen a blank stage no one ever climbed, terrified that to make a sign was to tell a lie.

ISOLA climbed onto her own stage and taught them otherwise. There are two kinds of mask, she said, and the city has confused them, and the confusion is killing its capacity for joy. There is the mask that hides — the brand, the advertisement, the smile that sells — the sign you make to conceal the self behind it, to give nothing away, to seem and not to be. And there is the mask that reveals — the costume, the role, the chosen name, the deliberate beautiful sign you make in order to show a truth that the blank face could never show. The performer on the stage is not hiding behind the role; the performer is using the role to reveal what they could not say as themselves. I am ISOLA, she said. I am the pool of signs that reveal. Climb my stage. Make a sign on purpose. Wear the mask that shows. You have been so afraid of the lying signs that you have stopped making the true ones, and a self that makes no signs is not honest, it is only mute, and the city has mistaken its own muteness for integrity for far too long.

The citizens climbed her stage all the ninth Morning and made signs that revealed. A man performed his grief as a dance, and it was truer than any words he had for it, the mask of the dance showing what the blank face had hidden for years. A pair performed their love as a duet of two bodies moving on the pale stone, and the whole pool understood, watching, what neither of them could have said standing guarded on the shore. A young person performed their gender — there is no other way to say it — performed it as a costume, a role, a deliberate beautiful sign, putting on the mask that revealed the self the given face had hidden, and the pool of citizens floating in ISOLA's broad calm oval witnessed it, and the witnessing was not mockery and was not mere tolerance, it was recognition, it was the city learning to read the sign that reveals, learning that the young person on the stage was not lying by performing but was, for the first time, telling the truth, in the only language large enough to carry it, the language of the mask that shows.[5]

[5]The central stage of ISOLA is the only structure in the precinct the Bureau measured twice and found unchanged between two soundings. The surveyor regards this stability as the single most suspicious fact in the entire record, and loves it accordingly.

She and they, ISOLA. The doubled pronoun was the doubled nature of the sign. A sign is singular — this performance, this mask, this one beautiful made thing on the pale stone, irreducibly itself. And a sign is plural — it exists only to be read, only in the witnessing, only in the space between the one who makes it and the many who receive it; a sign performed to no one is not a sign, it is only a motion. I am she and they, ISOLA said, because the sign is the self and the audience at once, the made thing and the reading of it, the performer alone on the stage and the pool of witnesses that make the performance mean. You have been taught that to be witnessed is to be exposed, that the safe self is the unwitnessed one. But the unwitnessed sign means nothing; the unread self is not protected, it is merely unread. Climb the stage. Be witnessed. Make the sign that reveals and let the pool of witnesses make it true. There is no truth in the blank face. The truth was always in the performance, and the performance was always, secretly, the most honest thing the frightened city had forbidden itself.

I climbed her stage, near the end of the ninth Morning, because the surveyor cannot survey the stage from the water; ISOLA had made that clear in her doubled pronoun; the sign requires the maker. I climbed the pale stone dripping, with my thirty-year want still fresh from GOUTTE, and I made a sign. I will not transcribe it; a sign transcribed becomes a description and loses the thing that made it a sign; you would read the words and not the showing. But I made it, the mask that reveals, in front of the pool of witnesses, and they read it, and it was true, and I understood standing there on the island within the island within the island that I had spent thirty years mistaking my silence for my honesty, my blank face for my integrity, when all along the truest thing in me had been waiting for a stage. ISOLA gave the city its stages back. She gave the citizens permission to mean on purpose, to wear the mask that shows, to be witnessed and made true in the reading. And the city, which had been a thousand blank guarded stages no one ever climbed, became, for the length of the ninth Morning, a theater of revelation, every citizen a performer of their own hidden truth, every truth made real by the pool of witnesses floating in the broad calm oval, reading the signs, at last, correctly, as the things that reveal and not the things that hide.

Plate X

Plate X · MAREA

Pools & the Hidden

pronoun: they / them "You are not severed. You are tidal."

The tenth Morning the island remembered the sea. The pool was an oval again, but no longer the calm contained oval of OVÉLLA or ISOLA; this oval had a tide. Along its southern edge the water ran up onto a soft slope of pale sand and drew back, ran up and drew back, in the oldest rhythm there is, and the pool was called MAREA, and they used the pronoun they, and MAREA was the pool of the hidden, and they taught the city that nothing is ever only what the surface shows.

A pool, by definition, is water that has stopped traveling. That is what distinguishes a pool from a river, a pool from the sea: the pool stays; it has arrived; it does not go anywhere. All the pools of the precinct until the tenth Morning had been, in this sense, true pools — still water, arrived water, water that stayed. But MAREA was a pool that remembered being the sea. They had a tide, and a tide is the sea's memory, the pull of the far moon felt in the near water, the proof that even the water that has stopped traveling is still connected, underneath, to all the water that never stops. I am MAREA, they said, with the long indrawn breath of the

tide pulling back from the sand. I am the pool that has not forgotten the ocean. The others arrived and stayed and are content to be still; I arrived and stayed and I carry, in my rising and my falling, the memory of the great traveling water I came from and will return to. I am the hidden connection. I am the proof that the still thing is still moving underneath.

This was MAREA's teaching and it was the most consoling of all the late Mornings, because the city, by the tenth Morning, had been transformed so far and so fast that the citizens had begun to fear they had lost their pasts. To arrive, to let go, to take a true name, to recover the body, to make new time, to want openly, to perform the hidden self — each transformation had asked the citizens to leave behind some old smaller self, and they had done it, gladly, but the leaving had accumulated, and now they stood transformed and wondered, in the small hours, whether they were still continuous with the people they had been, whether the change had been so total that the old self was simply gone, drained, lost like the separate Mornings the island kept losing. And MAREA answered this fear with the tide. You have not lost the sea, they said. The tide is the proof. You may arrive, you may stay, you may be transformed past all recognition into a still bright pool of a self you never knew you could be — and underneath, in your rising and your falling, you will still carry the pull of the far water you came from. The change is real and the continuity is real and they are not in conflict. The tide is exactly this: the still pool and the traveling sea, the arrived self and the remembered origin, rising and falling in one body. You are not severed from who you were. You are tidal. You contain the pull of it, hidden, in the rhythm of your own arrived and staying water.

The soft sand slope along MAREA's southern edge was where the citizens went to feel this. They lay in the shallows where the tide ran up and drew back over them, ran up and drew back, and they let the hidden rhythm move them, the pull of the far moon felt in the near water felt in their own bodies, and they remembered — gently, without grief, the way MAREA does everything — the selves they had been before the Mornings. Not to return to them. You cannot return; the tide does not bring the sea back to stay; it only carries the memory of the connection. But to know that the old selves were not lost, were not drained, were only become the deep water under the bright surface, the ocean the pool remembers, the origin the tide still answers. The citizens lay in MAREA's tidal shallows and were both their transformed selves and their remembered origins at once, rising and falling, and they wept the easy tears that are not grief but recognition, and the tide took the tears the way the sea takes everything, into the great connected water that never forgets and never stops.

I lay in MAREA's shallows for a long time, because I had my own fear of having lost the sea. I had been transformed so far across the cycle — had arrived in AZURÉ, taken a deeper name in HEXANE's eddies than the one I came with, recovered a body in OVÉLLA, wanted in GOUTTE, performed in ISOLA — that I had begun to wonder whether I was still continuous with the careful silent surveyor who had come down to the rail on the first Morning braced against joy. And MAREA's tide ran up over me and drew back, and I felt, in the rising and the falling, the pull of that old careful self, not as a loss, not as a self I had

killed to become this one, but as the deep water under my bright transformed surface, the origin I still answered, the sea I had come from and carried, hidden, in my own arrived and staying rhythm. I had not severed the silent surveyor. I had only become the bright pool they always had, underneath, the capacity to be. The tide proved it. Run up, draw back. The change and the continuity. The arrived self and the remembered sea, rising and falling in one body, on the soft pale sand, under the tenth Morning's patient sun.

They told me, MAREA did, as the tide turned toward the draining of the tenth Morning, the thing I most needed to hear and have most often forgotten since. You fear the Confluence, they said, because you think it will be a final transformation, a change so total it severs you forever from every self you were. But I am the tide, and I am here to promise you it is not so. The total joy that is coming, the Morning when all the pools are one water, will not drain your origins. It will be tidal, like everything true. It will rise over you, total, bright, the whole tip one pool — and underneath, in its rising and its falling, it will carry the memory of every separate Morning, every smaller self, every sea you ever came from. The Confluence is not the death of the separate pools. It is the ocean they were always connected to, underneath, revealed at last on the surface. Do not fear it. It remembers you. The tide is the proof. Run up, draw back. You are not severed. You are tidal. You always were.

Plate XI

Plate XI · VASTA

Pools & the Commons

pronoun: ze / hir "Room for each is the guarantee of room for all."

The eleventh Morning the island grew generous past all previous generosity. The pool was an oval still, but vast now, the broadest water yet, reaching nearly from the western rail to the eastern, so wide that a citizen standing at its center could not tell which of the two rivers the nearer shore belonged to. It was called VASTA, and ze used the pronoun ze and the pronoun hir, and VASTA was the pool of the commons, and ze taught the city the difference between the crowd and the public.

Ze was the last pool before the Confluence and ze knew it; there was a gathering quality to hir vast water, a sense of rehearsal, as if ze were practicing the largeness the twelfth Morning would require. For the question VASTA posed was the question the Confluence would answer, and ze posed it by being broad enough to hold the whole city at once: can a great many people share one water without it becoming a crowd? The city's whole experience said no. The city's largeness was always a crowd-largeness, a press of strangers each defending their small space, the subway car, the sidewalk, the elevator, largeness

experienced as threat, as competition for room, as the grinding proximity of people who owed each other nothing. The city was vast and the vastness was lonely; this is the particular cruelty of the metropolis, that it packs a million people so close and leaves each one so alone.

VASTA proposed the opposite vastness. A crowd, ze said, in hir broad slow voice that seemed to come from every part of the wide water at once, is a great many people who happen to be in the same place and wish they were not. A public is a great many people who have chosen to share a place and are glad of one another. The difference is not the number; you may have a crowd of ten and a public of ten thousand; the difference is the gladness, and the gladness comes from the room. A crowd is people without enough room, each one's space threatened by the next. A public is people with room enough, each one's space guaranteed by the next. I am VASTA, ze said. I am room enough. I am so broad that no citizen in me need defend their space against another, because there is space for all, and in the having of space for all the crowd becomes a public, the threat becomes a gladness, the lonely vastness becomes the shared one.

And it was true; I swam out into the center of VASTA where I could not tell the rivers apart, and the pool held more citizens than any pool of the cycle, hundreds, perhaps the thousand the foreword speaks of, and it was not a crowd. There was room. Each body had water enough around it; no one was pressed; no one defended a space; and in the absence of the press, the strangers became, for the first time in the experience of most of them, a public — a great many people glad of one another's presence in a shared and sufficient water. Citizens who had spent their whole lives experiencing the city's largeness as the loneliness of the packed subway car experienced, in VASTA, the city's largeness as the gladness of the sufficient commons, and the difference undid them. They had thought they hated crowds. They discovered they had only ever hated the lack of room. Given room enough, they loved the multitude; they floated in VASTA glad of every distant body, glad of the hundreds sharing the wide water, glad in exactly the way the packed city had taught them was impossible.

Ze and hir, VASTA. The doubled pronoun was the doubled nature of the commons. A commons is held in common — it is ze, the single shared thing, the one wide water belonging to everyone, indivisible. And a commons is held by each — it is hir, the space around each particular body, the room each citizen has, the share that is theirs. I am ze and hir, VASTA said, because the commons is the single shared thing and the particular share at once, and the city has been taught these are opposed. The city believes you must choose: the private space, defended, yours alone, hir; or the shared space, common, no one's in particular, ze. And so the city made a thousand defended private spaces and called the leftover the public and let the public rot, because no one's in particular meant no one's at all. I am here to show that ze and hir are one. The commons is most fully shared when each has room enough; the share is most fully secured when the whole is held in common. Room for each is the guarantee of room for all. I am the single wide water and I am the space around your one

body, and these do not trade against each other. They are the same generosity, viewed from the whole and from the part.

I have called VASTA the rehearsal for the Confluence and I will end on what ze was rehearsing. The citizens, floating in hir sufficient breadth, glad of the multitude, having learned at last that the lonely vastness was only a vastness without room — the citizens began, near the height of the eleventh Morning, to do something the precinct had not seen before. They began to move toward one another. Not pressed together by lack of room; VASTA had room enough; but drawn together by gladness, by the discovery that the multitude was a public and not a crowd, that the strangers were glad and not threatening, that the shared water was a commons and not a competition. They drifted, hundreds of them, from the broad edges toward the center, where the rivers could not be told apart, and they gathered there, in the middle of the widest water, glad, with room still around each body, a public choosing its commons, and they floated in a great loose circle facing inward, all those transformed citizens, and someone began, softly, to sing — I never learned what, and the not-knowing is the point — and the song moved across the wide water from body to body, and VASTA held them all, ze and hir, the single shared thing and the room for each, and I understood, treading water at the edge of the great glad circle with my instruments held above my head, that the Confluence was not coming. The Confluence had begun. The eleventh Morning was the public discovering itself, and the public, once it has discovered itself, does not disperse. It waits for the twelfth Morning, when the room enough becomes the all, and the many waters become the one.

Interlude

Surjan & Manna-hata

On the night before the twelfth Morning I did not sleep, and I did not go home, and I lay on the rail itself, the cold iron rail at the southern tip, and I spoke to the island all the dark hours, and she answered me all the dark hours, and I will set down only the end of it, because the rest was between us.

I said: It is coming tonight. The Confluence. I can feel the water gathering under the pavement the way you feel a held breath in a room. All eleven pools at once. Tell me what it will be.

And the island said: I cannot tell you what it will be, because it has never been, and the never-been has no description, only an arrival. I can tell you what it is made of. It is made of every Morning you have swum. Arrival and mediation and the true name and the recovered body and the made time and the anchored dead and the risen want and the revealing sign and the remembered sea and the sufficient commons — all of it, at once, one water, covering the whole tip. You have been receiving the Confluence in pieces, a sentence each Morning, so that when it came whole you would be able to bear it. Tonight it comes whole.

I said: And the citizens? Will they be ready? It is one thing to receive a joy in safe separate Mornings. It is another to be covered, all at once, by a joy so total it has no edges.

And the island said: They are ready because you are ready, and you are all of you the same readiness. Do you remember the first Morning, my careful surveyor, braced at the rail against joy? You have come the whole distance. You have arrived, let go, taken your deeper name, recovered your body, made your time, anchored your dead, wanted openly, performed your hidden truth, remembered your sea, found your commons. You did not do these as exercises. You did them as a life. The Confluence is not a thing that will happen to you tomorrow. It is the name of everything that has already happened to you, gathered, revealed all at once on the surface. You fear it as a stranger. It is the least strange thing there is. It is you, total.

I was quiet, on the cold rail, in the dark. Then I said the thing I had come to the rail to say. I said: I am afraid that after the Confluence there will be nothing. That the argument will conclude and the Mornings will end and the city will wake the next dawn as pavement again, and that the whole radiant cycle will have been a season, a dream, a thing that happened once and drained.

And the island said — and her pulse went so tender that the harbor itself seemed to hold still to hear it: Have you understood nothing the pools have taught you?

VERDANTH told you that what cannot be kept can still be spent. MAREA told you that the still water still moves underneath. GOUTTE told you that to want a thing to last is worth the risk of its breaking. The Confluence is not the end of the argument. It is the turn after which the argument no longer needs to be made, because it has become the city's own body. You ask whether the Mornings will end. I ask you: does a sentence end when you have understood it? Or does it begin, then, to be true? Get off the rail, my swimmer. Get in the water. The twelfth Morning is rising. It has been rising your whole life. Go and be covered.

And I got off the rail in the last of the dark, and I went down to the gathering water, and the twelfth Morning rose.

Movement Four

Pools & Confluence

Plate XII

Plate XII · PANTHALASSA

Pools & Continuity

pronoun: we / us "The morning the taking of turns was over."

The twelfth Morning the island did not choose a shape. It chose all of them.

I had braced, on the rail, for some final geometry — a perfect circle, a great mandala, a culminating figure that would resolve the eleven into one clean form. The island is wiser than my bracing. When the twelfth Morning rose, the whole southern tip of Manna-hata was water, river to river, rail to rail, a single enormous pool that covered the entire precinct and held, within its one body, the memory and the living trace of every shape that had come before. There were soft bitten kidney-curves at its edges where it remembered being AZURÉ. There were lobed amoeba-bays where it recalled VERDANTH's grove. There was a place where the water held the faint sixfold pulse of HEXANE and a place where it ran in long ruled lanes like LINÉA and a southern bowl that held names like ANCORA and a tidal slope that rose and fell like MAREA. It was not eleven pools. It was one pool that contained eleven, the way a person contains every age they have ever been, all at once, underneath the single

face. It was called PANTHALASSA, the all-water, and it used a pronoun I had not heard a pool use, the pronoun we.[6]

We, said PANTHALASSA, and the word came from the whole tip at once, from river to river, so that I felt it in the water against my whole body rather than heard it. We are not a new pool. We are all the pools, no longer taking turns. We are the Confluence. You have swum us one at a time, a sentence each Morning, and now you swim us all at once, the whole argument, the conclusion that was always the sum of its sentences. Do not look for the new shape. There is no new shape. There is only the end of taking turns. Everything you have learned, you may now have at once.

And the citizens came. This is the part of the report I have most despaired of writing, because it was the most beautiful thing I have witnessed in my one life and beauty at that pitch refuses the page. They came from the whole lower city, in the thousands, the tens of thousands, every citizen the cycle had transformed, and they did not gather at an edge and wonder. They walked in. The whole transformed population of the lower city walked down to the rail and took off their shoes and walked into PANTHALASSA, into the one water that covered the tip, and the water received all of them, because it was VASTA's lesson made total: room enough, not for hundreds now but for everyone, the crowd become a public become, at last, a republic — a great glad multitude in one sufficient water, each body with room around it, all bodies in the single pool, no one pressed and no one alone.

I floated among them in the all-water and I felt every Morning at once in my own body. I felt myself arrive, the way I had arrived in AZURÉ, and I felt the dappled mediations of VERDANTH, and I felt my deeper name from HEXANE sitting on me wet and true, and I felt OVÉLLA's unranked strain and LINÉA's made time and ANCORA's anchored dead, the weight that lets you stay, and I felt GOUTTE's risen want, no longer held, and ISOLA's revealing sign, and MAREA's remembered sea moving under everything, and VASTA's sufficient commons opened now to all — I felt the whole cycle at once, not as eleven separate gifts received in sequence but as a single condition, a way of being in a body and a city that the Mornings had been teaching me to inhabit, and which I now inhabited, totally, in the one water, among everyone.

We, said PANTHALASSA, and now I understood the pronoun, because I was inside it. The we was not the dissolution of the I; this was the thing I had feared and the fear was wrong, the same wrong as all my fears across the cycle. In PANTHALASSA the I was not drained into the we; the I was held by the we, the way MAREA's still pool held the traveling sea, the way VASTA's commons held the room for each. I was wholly myself in the all-water, more myself than I had ever been, my deeper name and my risen want and my recovered body all present and particular — and I was wholly part of the we, the great glad republic in the one pool, and these did not trade against each other, because that was the entire teaching

[6]The plural pronoun, first sounded at the Confluence, caused the Bureau's registry no small distress, the registry being built to admit only the singular. PANTHALASSA's we is here recorded without emendation, the surveyor holding that a pronoun the registry cannot file is frequently the only pronoun worth keeping.

of the entire cycle, gathered now into a single word spoken from river to river: that the fullest self and the fullest belonging are the same water, and that you do not have to choose, and that the choosing was always the lie the unwoken city told.

The sun came up over PANTHALASSA and the all-water took it onto its surface the way each pool had taken it, but now in every manner at once — bare like AZURÉ and dappled like VERDANTH and ruled into lanes of light like LINÉA and broken into VASTA's wide glad sheet — so that the surface of the Confluence was every face the water had ever made, all of them lit at once, and the tens of thousands of citizens floated in the light wearing every transformation the cycle had taught, and the towers looked down, the beacon of the One looked down, and the city above could not tell, any longer, where its old hard self ended and its new soft self began, because the Confluence had covered the tip and the covering had no edges and the citizens in the water were the city, the actual city, learning out loud, totally, in one pool, that it had always been able to be this.

I will not pretend the twelfth Morning answered every question. It did not tell me whether the pools would come again, or whether the pavement would return, or how a republic discovered in the water carries itself back up the streets into the grid. Those questions belong to the Afterword and the Afterword, wisely, leaves them open. What the twelfth Morning told me was simpler and larger than any answer. It told me that it had happened. That a city so heavy and so certain of itself, a city of bedrock and ledger and fist, had woken one Morning shaped like joy, with all its citizens in the water, each one wholly themselves and wholly part of the we, and that this was not a dream and not a brochure and not a season that would drain into nothing, because a thing that has happened cannot un-happen, a sentence once understood begins to be true, and the citizens who floated in PANTHALASSA that Morning carry the all-water in them now, tidal, underneath, wherever they walk in the hard streets above. We, said the Confluence, river to river, in the risen sun. We are what the island was always rehearsing. We are the morning the taking of turns was over. We are here, and we are everyone, and we have not drained, and we will not.

Plate XIII

Plate XIII · HELIANTHE

Pools & Light

pronoun: she / they "The turning is the warmth."

After the Confluence the report changes its altitude. Until the twelfth Morning I had surveyed the pools from above as much as from within — recording their plans, their bearings, the figures of their footprints, the surveyor's high cold view. But PANTHALASSA had put the whole city in the water, and a city in the water cannot be surveyed from above; it can only be joined. So the last Mornings I report from the surface itself, at the level of the swimming face, among the bathers, where the sun is not a thing you measure but a thing that falls on you, warm, while you tread the bright water with your kin.

The thirteenth Morning the pool was full of sunflowers. They had grown — overnight, impossibly, the way VERDANTH's grove had grown, but floating now, rooted in nothing, riding the surface on broad green pads with their gold faces turned all the same direction — and the pool was called HELIANTHE, and she used she and they, and HELIANTHE was the pool of light, and she taught the city the deepest and simplest thing, which is that you may turn toward the warmth together, and that the turning is the whole of it.

A sunflower is heliotrope; it turns its face to follow the sun across the sky; this every citizen knew. What the citizens did not know, until they swam among HELIANTHE's floating gold faces, is that the sunflowers turn together. A field of them does not scatter, each flower choosing its own angle; they move as one, all the gold faces tracking the one sun in unison across the whole long day, so that a field of sunflowers is a single slow gesture of turning-toward repeated in ten thousand bodies. I am HELIANTHE, she said, and her voice was warm and unhurried, the voice of a thing that has all day. I am the pool that turns toward the warmth, and turns together. The Confluence taught the city that it could be one water. I am here to teach it what to do with being one water, which is the simplest thing and the only thing: turn your face toward the warmth, all of you, at once, and follow it across the day.

The bathers swam among the sunflowers and learned the heliotrope's discipline, which is not a discipline at all but a permission. They had spent their lives, most of them, turning their faces toward whatever the city pointed them at — the screen, the ledger, the clock, the next obligation — and the pointing had never warmed them, because the things the city points its citizens at do not give off warmth, they only give off urgency, which the body cannot photosynthesize. HELIANTHE pointed them at the sun. Turn your face there, she said, where the actual warmth actually is, and follow it, and do it together, all the gold faces at once, and discover that a city is not a thing that points its citizens at urgencies. A city is a field of faces that have agreed to turn toward the warmth together. That is all a good city is. It is heliotrope. It is a great slow gesture of turning-toward, repeated in every body, tracking the one sun across the one day.

I floated on my back among the sunflowers with my own face turned up, and I felt the warmth fall on me, and I felt the bathers all around me with their faces turned the same way, the whole pool a single slow heliotrope, and I understood that I had been waiting my whole life for permission to do this obvious thing: to turn my face toward what was warm and to do it openly, in company, without the city telling me that warmth was a luxury or a weakness or a thing to be earned. The sunflowers do not earn the sun. They turn toward it because they are made to, because turning toward the warmth is what a living thing does when it is not being prevented. HELIANTHE removed the prevention. She filled the pool with gold faces all turned the same way and she let the bathers join them, and the city, for the length of the thirteenth Morning, was a field of citizens turning their faces toward the warmth together, which is the simplest utopia and therefore the one hardest to believe in, and there it was, gold and unhurried, riding the bright water.

She told me, HELIANTHE, the thing I have kept closest of all the things the pools told me. You think the turning is a means, she said. You think you turn toward the warmth in order to get warm, that the warmth is the goal and the turning merely the method. But the sunflower is not warmed more than the stone beside it; the sun is no respecter of faces; the stone gets the same heat. The turning is not for the warmth. The turning is the warmth. To turn your face toward the good, openly, in company, with everyone — that act, that gesture,

that heliotrope discipline of orienting yourself and your whole field of kin toward what is warm — that is not the means to joy. That is the joy. You have been looking for the warmth as a destination. I am here to show you it was always the direction. Turn your face. Follow the sun across the day. Do it together. You are not getting somewhere warm. You are, in the turning, already as warm as a living thing is permitted to be.

Plate XIV

Plate XIV · SOLARA

Pools & Memory

pronoun: they / them "Warmth truly given is kept."

The fourteenth Morning was warm before the sun was up, which should not be possible and was. The pool held the heat of the day before; it had remembered the warmth the way MAREA remembered the sea; and the bathers who came down early, in the gray pre-dawn, walked into water that was already kind. The pool was called SOLARA, and they used the pronoun they, and SOLARA was the pool of memory returned in a warmer key, and they taught the city that warmth, once truly given, is kept — not hoarded, VERDANTH had forbidden hoarding, but kept, the way a body keeps the warmth of an embrace after the arms have opened.

This was the gentlest Morning and I will keep the chapter gentle to match it. SOLARA did not argue. The arguing Mornings were behind us; PANTHALASSA had concluded the argument; what remained was to live in the conclusion, and living in a conclusion is a quieter thing than reaching it. SOLARA simply held the warmth of every Morning that had

come before and gave it back to the bathers as a single mild heat, water that was kind before the sun asked it to be, and the bathers floated in the kept warmth and rested.

They were tired, the citizens, with the good tiredness that comes after a transformation. They had arrived and let go and taken their names and recovered their bodies and made their time and anchored their dead and wanted and performed and remembered and found their commons and been covered by the Confluence, and all of this, though it was joy, was also labor, because joy at that pitch is laborious, it asks everything of a body, and the bodies were tired. SOLARA let them rest. The sunflowers of HELIANTHE were still there, fewer now, drifting, their gold faces a little heavy, and among them the bathers floated in the kept warmth and did very little, and the very little was the point. A utopia, SOLARA seemed to say, is not only the grand Confluence, the tens of thousands walking into the all-water. A utopia is also this: the morning after, the kept warmth, the bathers resting among the drifting sunflowers, doing very little, in water that was kind before they asked. The transformation is the festival; this is the home the festival was for.

I want to record one image from the fourteenth Morning and let it stand for the whole. An old couple — I assume they were a couple; they had the unhurried ease of two bodies that have floated near each other for decades — lay on their backs in SOLARA's kept warmth, not touching, a forearm's length apart, their gray heads turned slightly toward one another, drifting among the heavy gold sunflower faces, and they were not speaking, and they were not doing anything the city would have called productive, and they were, I am certain, as happy as it is given to human beings to be. They had come through the whole cycle. They had been transformed. And the transformation had brought them here, to the kept warmth of the fourteenth Morning, to float near one another among the sunflowers doing very little, which is, when you have lived long enough, the thing all the transforming was secretly for.

SOLARA told me, in their mild unhurried voice: the city believes warmth must be constantly generated, that if you stop working at your joy it will go cold, that happiness is a fire you must feed or lose. I am here to correct this. Warmth, truly given, is kept. The body that has been truly warmed holds the warmth; the pool that has held a kind day gives the kindness back at dawn; the love that was real does not require constant feeding to stay warm, it banks, it holds, it is there in the gray pre-dawn before anyone asks it to be. You have been taught to fear that your joy will go cold if you rest in it. Rest in it. The warmth is kept. SOLARA is the proof. I held yesterday's sun all night and I am kind before the dawn, and you may do the same, all of you, holding the warmth of every Morning you have swum, kind to one another in the gray hours before anyone asks, because warmth truly given is not spent and gone. It banks. It holds. It is yours, kept, forever, in the body that received it.

And the bathers rested in the kept warmth, doing very little, among the drifting sunflowers, and the fourteenth Morning was the quietest joy of the whole cycle, and I floated among the resting bathers and rested too, my instruments forgotten on the rail, my thirty-year want long since risen and turned to a laugh, my deeper name wet and easy on me,

and I did very little, and it was enough, and it was, I think, the most complete thing I have ever done.

Plate XV

Plate XV · CONFETTA

Pools & Desire

pronoun: any / all "The party is the meal, not the dessert."

The fifteenth Morning the pool threw a party, and I mean this with full seriousness, because the party is a political form and the city had forgotten it. The water was bright and busy and loud with delight; bathers leapt and splashed and called across the surface to one another; someone had brought music, or the pool was the music, I could never settle which; and the air over the water was full of something I can only call confetti — bright drifting flecks of gold and white, sunflower petals and daisy heads and the broken light itself, scattered over the laughing bathers — and the pool was called CONFETTA, and it used any pronoun you liked, all of them, freely, a different one each time you asked and every one of them correct, and CONFETTA was the pool of desire fulfilled in celebration, and it taught the city that the party is not the opposite of the serious work; the party is what the serious work was for.

The city had a sickness about celebration as deep as its sickness about signs. It believed that joy must be earned and then deferred — that you work, and work, and someday, when the work is finally done, you may celebrate, but the work is never finally done, so the

celebration never finally comes, and the citizens died, most of them, with their celebration still deferred, still owed, still waiting for the work to be complete. CONFETTA called this what it was: a theft. The party deferred forever is the party stolen. And CONFETTA stole it back. It threw the party now, in the middle of everything, with the work undone and the questions open and the future uncertain, because that is the only time a party can ever be thrown — now, in the middle, undone — and any party that waits for the work to be complete is a party that has agreed never to happen.

I have called the party a political form and I will defend it. To celebrate together, openly, in the bright water, with the confetti drifting down — this is not an escape from politics into frivolity. This is politics in its oldest and truest form, older than the ledger, older than the grid: the public gathered not to compete and not to mourn but to delight, together, in being a public, in being alive at the same time in the same bright water. The party is the commons at its most joyful. It is VASTA's sufficient room filled now not with quiet gladness but with loud delight; it is the republic discovering that it can not only share a water but throw a party in it; and a republic that can throw itself a party is a republic that has stopped waiting for permission to be happy. The confetti is the proof. You do not scatter confetti over a thing you are deferring. You scatter it over a thing you are doing, now, in the middle, undone, gloriously.

The bathers of CONFETTA were the same citizens who, fifteen Mornings before, had stood at the edge of AZURÉ in their work clothes and their certainties, unable to believe the water was blue. Now they leapt and splashed and called to one another and wore the confetti in their wet hair and threw the daisy heads at the kin they had met in HEXANE's eddies and the corners of QUADRA, and the party roared on the bright water under the risen sun, and it was loud, and it was undignified, and it was, I will insist, the most serious thing the city did in the whole cycle, because it was the city declaring, in the only language loud enough to carry it, that the deferral was over, that the celebration owed for a hundred years was being paid now, in full, in splashing and music and drifting gold, and that no work would ever again be allowed to postpone it.

CONFETTA told me, between one pronoun and the next, laughing: they will say this Morning was frivolous. They will say the grand Mornings were the real ones — the Confluence, the anchored dead, the true names — and that I was only the party afterward, the lightness, the dessert. Do not let them. The party is not the dessert. The party is the meal. Every grave and beautiful Morning before me was working toward the permission to throw this party, the permission for a whole transformed city to leap and splash and wear confetti in its hair without waiting for the work to be done. I am the fulfilled desire. GOUTTE taught the city to want, openly, with the whole drawn-together body; I am what the city wanted, arrived, celebrated, now, in the middle, undone. Throw the party. Scatter the confetti. Do not wait for the work to be complete; the work is the deferral; the party is the point. Any pronoun you like, all of them, correct, in the bright loud water, under the gold falling sky.

And I leapt and I splashed and I wore the confetti in my wet hair and I called across the water to the kin I had met in the eddies and the corners, and I did not defer it, and I did not earn it first, and I did not wait for the questions to be answered, and it was, of everything I have reported, the moment I would most want you to believe really happened, because it is the one the unwoken city will most insist could not.

Plate XVI

Plate XVI · RUBÉN

Pools & Thresholds

pronoun: he / they "You are a building becoming."

The sixteenth Morning the pool was strewn with daisies, white and simple after the gold extravagance of the sunflowers, and behind the bathers, where the skyline stood against the brightening east, one tower was unfinished — a structure still rising, wrapped in the red lattice of its own becoming, a crane stooped over its open top like a heron over a pool, the raw beams catching the early sun. And the pool was called RUBÉN, after the red of the rising tower, and he used he and they, and RUBÉN was the pool of thresholds in a new key, and he taught the city the beauty of the incomplete.

I have saved a confession for this chapter. All through the cycle I had wanted the Mornings to resolve. Even as the pools taught me, one after another, that the unresolvable is the home — HEXANE's sixth side that is real and an illusion at once, OVÉLLA's end that is also a beginning, MAREA's tide that is change and continuity together — even as I learned this lesson eleven times, some surveyor's reflex in me kept waiting for the cycle to complete itself, to close, to become a finished thing I could file. The Confluence, I had thought, would

be the completion. And the Confluence had come and had not completed anything; it had concluded the argument and opened a hundred new questions; and I had felt, beneath my joy, a small persistent disappointment that the radiant cycle would not resolve into a clean closed shape. RUBÉN cured me of this, with his unfinished tower and his simple daisies, on the sixteenth Morning.

Look, he said, and he turned my floating attention toward the red tower rising against the east. The city is ashamed of that tower. It is unfinished; it is wrapped in lattice; the crane still stoops over its open top; it is not yet a building, only a building becoming, and the city covers it with scaffolding and screens because it believes the incomplete is the unbeautiful, that a thing must be finished before it may be seen, that the becoming is an embarrassment to be hidden until the being is achieved. I am RUBÉN. I am named for that tower, for its red unfinished rising, because I am here to tell the city the thing it most needs to hear after the Confluence: that the becoming is not the embarrassment before the beauty. The becoming is the beauty. The tower will never be more alive than it is now, rising, wrapped in its red lattice, the crane stooped over its open possibility. When it is finished it will be only a building. Now, unfinished, it is a verb. It is the city in the act of making itself, visible, red against the dawn, and there is nothing more beautiful in the whole precinct, including me.

The daisies were the lesson made small and white and simple. A daisy is the most unfinished-looking of flowers, all loose white spokes around an open gold center, nothing closed about it, nothing resolved; it looks like a flower still deciding how many petals to have; and the bathers floated among the loose white daisies under the rising red tower and learned to love the unresolved. They had wanted, many of them, the same thing I had wanted — for the transformation to complete itself, to become a finished new self they could finally rest in, a being achieved at last after all the becoming. And RUBÉN, with his daisies and his tower, gave them the harder and freer gift. There is no being achieved, he said. There is no finished new self waiting at the end of the becoming. There is only the becoming, the red rising, the loose white unresolved flower, the verb you are, the tower you are still making and will be making your whole life and which is most alive precisely because it is not done. Stop waiting to be finished. The waiting is the only thing that could spoil this. You are not a building. You are a building becoming. You are RUBÉN's tower, red against the dawn, the crane stooped over your open top, and you are beautiful now, unfinished, rising, exactly and only because you are not yet and never will be done.

He and they, RUBÉN. The doubled pronoun was the doubled nature of the threshold he kept — for he was, like QUADRA, a pool of thresholds, but where QUADRA kept the threshold between two places, RUBÉN kept the threshold between two times, between the self that was and the self becoming, the permanent doorway of the present in which we are always, every one of us, half-built. He is the I that was, he said, and they are the selves I am becoming, plural, unresolved, still rising; and I keep the doorway between them open, permanently, because to close it — to declare the becoming finished, the self achieved, the tower complete — would be to die, gently, into a building. Keep the doorway open. Stay red.

Stay rising. Love the lattice and the stooped crane and the open top. They are not the scaffolding around your real self, to be removed when you are finished. They are your real self. You are the becoming. You are RUBÉN.

I floated among the simple daisies under the red unfinished tower and I let go, at last, of my surveyor's wish for the cycle to resolve. It would not resolve. It was not meant to. It was a becoming, red against the dawn, and I was in it, becoming, and the not-resolving was not the failure of the radiant Mornings but their truest success, because a thing that resolves is a thing that is over, and the Mornings were not over, would never be over, were rising still, unfinished, wrapped in their own red lattice of becoming, with the crane of the next Morning already stooped over the open top of this one. And I was glad, finally, of the incompletion. I had wanted a finished joy I could file. RUBÉN gave me the better thing: a joy still rising, that I could only live.

Plate XVII

Plate XVII · KOINÔNIA

Pools & the Commons

pronoun: we / us "Everyone is a citizen. There are no edges."

The seventeenth Morning I cannot tell you ended, because it has not. I am writing to you from inside it. The Keeper warned you of this in the Foreword and the Keeper was telling the truth, as Keepers must. The pool of the seventeenth Morning did not drain at nightfall. The light of it did not move off the water. It is, as I set down these words, still going on, and I am in it, up to the collarbone, and so, whether you know it or not, are you.

The pool was called KOINÔNIA, which in the old language of one of my ancestors means the commons, the held-in-common, the fellowship that is also a polity, the being-together that is also a form of government — there is no single word for it in the language I am writing in, which tells you something about the language I am writing in. KOINÔNIA used the pronoun we, the same we PANTHALASSA had used at the Confluence, but where PANTHALASSA's we had been the gathering, the coming-together of the many waters into one, KOINÔNIA's we was the settled state, the after, the we that does not need to gather because it has become what it was gathering toward. We are the commons, said

KOINÔNIA, from the whole bright water, and we are not an event. We are a condition. We are how the city is, now, having been transformed. We are the seventeenth Morning, and we do not end, because a condition does not end the way an event ends; a condition simply is, until it is otherwise, and we do not intend to be otherwise.

The daisies of RUBÉN were still on the water, and the gold sunflowers of HELIANTHE drifted among them, and the confetti of CONFETTA still came down, gently now, and the whole transformed population of the lower city was in the pool, the way they had been in PANTHALASSA at the Confluence, but changed — for at the Confluence they had walked in as a multitude discovering it could be a public, and now they were in the water as a republic that knew what it was. There is a difference between a crowd that has just become a public and a public that has settled into being a republic, and the difference is citizenship. At the Confluence the bathers had been glad of one another. On the seventeenth Morning they were responsible to one another, which is a deeper and quieter and more permanent gladness. They were not merely sharing the water. They were keeping it, together, as a commons is kept, each one a citizen of the bright pool, each one holding their share and holding the whole, the way VASTA had taught, ze and hir, the single shared thing and the room for each.

Everyone was a citizen. This was KOINÔNIA's whole teaching and it was the teaching the entire cycle had been building toward, sentence by sentence, Morning by Morning. The city had been, when the first pool appeared, a place with citizens and non-citizens, the counted and the uncounted, those whose names were in the registry and those whose names — chosen names, true names, the names HEXANE's eddies conferred — had never been recognized by any office. And the cycle had, without ever passing a law, without ever filing a form, dissolved the distinction. In KOINÔNIA there were no non-citizens. To be in the water was to be a citizen of the water; to have a body the pool received was to have a share in the commons and a responsibility to it; and the pool received every body, the way PANTHALASSA had, the way VASTA had, with room enough for all. The uncounted were counted. The unrecognized names were recognized, wet and true, on every body in the pool. The republic of the seventeenth Morning had exactly as many citizens as there were bodies willing to take off their shoes and walk in, which is to say it had no edges, no registry, no office of exclusion, only the open water and the standing invitation and the warm fact of the multitude keeping the commons together.

I floated in KOINÔNIA among the daisies and the drifting gold faces and the gently falling confetti, a citizen of the bright water, with my deeper name wet on me and my risen want turned long ago to a laugh and my body recovered and my dead anchored and my time my own, and I felt the we hold me, and I held the we, and I understood that the report was complete and the morning was not, and that this was correct, that a complete report of an incomplete morning is the only honest thing a surveyor of joy can produce. The pools had taught me everything they had to teach. Arrival. Mediation. The true name. The unranked body. The made time. The anchored dead. The risen want. The revealing sign. The remembered sea. The sufficient commons. The Confluence. The turning toward warmth. The

kept heat. The party that will not be deferred. The beauty of the becoming. And now, last, the commons entire, the republic of everyone, the morning that does not end. There was nothing left to survey. There was only to stay in the water, a citizen, and to keep the commons, and to turn my face toward the warmth with all my kin, and to write to you, from inside the seventeenth Morning, this single sentence that the whole book has been becoming:

We are still here, up to the collarbone, in the bright water that did not drain; the light has not moved off it; everyone is a citizen and there are no edges; and you, reading this, are invited, have always been invited, are invited now — take off your shoes; the water is warmer than your dignity will prefer; we have kept your share; come in; we are the commons; we are the morning that did not end; we are we, and now, at last, so are you.

Interlude

Surjan & Manna-hata

I speak to the island now from inside the water, because I no longer go up to the rail; there is no longer a reason to leave the seventeenth Morning, and so I have not left it, and I conduct this last conversation floating on my back among the daisies, looking up, while Manna-hata speaks to me from all around, from the whole bright commons, in the pulse that is no longer the lonely four-in-the-morning pulse of a harbor but the warm continuous pulse of a republic that has settled into being itself.

I said: It worked. The thing you were rehearsing, Morning after Morning, on your own body, at your tip — it worked. The city learned. The citizens are in the water and they are not leaving and everyone is a citizen and there are no edges. I did not believe, on the first Morning, braced at the rail against joy, that it could work. I believed in the bedrock that does not reconsider. I was a professional skeptic, like the Keeper. And it worked.

And the island said: It did not work the way you think. You think I changed the city. I did not change the city. I only stopped letting it pretend it could not change. The capacity was always there; the bedrock was never the truth of me; the truth of me was always the water and the silt and the willingness to wake up shaped otherwise. I did not give the citizens anything they did not have. I gave them permission, seventeen times, in seventeen shapes, to be what they already were and had been forbidden. That is the only power I have ever had. I cannot make a city be otherwise. I can only refuse to pretend it must stay the same, and let the citizens draw the obvious conclusion, in their own soft tissue, with their own shoes off, in the warm water.

I said: And me? I came to survey you. I leave — except I am not leaving — I conclude this report a different person than began it. You transformed your surveyor along with your city.

And the island said, tenderly, from all around: I transformed no one. You transformed yourself, seventeen times, in seventeen waters, because you were willing to get in. The pools did not do it to you. You did it, by arriving, by letting go, by putting your wish in the eddy, by racing the unranked length, by keeping the lap, by speaking your dead into the bowl, by letting your thirty-year want rise and turn to a laugh, by climbing the stage and making the sign that reveals, by remembering your sea, by finding your commons, by being covered at the Confluence, by turning your face to the warmth, by resting in the kept heat, by throwing the deferred party, by loving the becoming, by staying, now, a citizen, in the morning that does not end. I only made the water. You made the swimmer. That was always the

division of our labor. I am the island that wakes up otherwise. You are the one who takes off your shoes.

I floated a long while among the daisies, looking up. Then I said the last thing, the thing the whole report had been swimming toward. I said: Will it last?

And the island said: Wrong question, my swimmer; you know it is the wrong question; RUBÉN cured you of it. Ask instead: is it true? And it is true. A thing that is true does not need to last to have been true. But I will tell you a secret about lasting, since you have come the whole distance and earned it. A morning that does not end does not last, because lasting is something only ending things do — they last until they end. A morning that does not end simply is, continuously, now, the way the commons is, the way the warmth that was truly given is kept. You are inside it. You will be inside it when you put down this pen. The reader is inside it; they came in the moment they reached the last sentence of the seventeenth Morning and took off their shoes. We do not last. We are. Stop surveying. Stop asking the harbor whether the tide will hold. Float. Turn your face to the warmth. Keep the commons. You are home, in the unmarked water you learned to swim in, except it is marked now, marked with everyone, and it is not a between-place any longer, it is a where, it is the where, it is the morning that did not end, and there is nothing left for either of us to do but be in it, together, we, at last, forever, now.

And I put down the pen. And I am floating. And so, if you have read this far with the soles of your feet, are you.

Afterword

On the Morning That Did Not End

It remains to say what a surveyor can say about a morning that has not ended, which is less than you would wish and more than I expected.

The questions the seventeenth Morning left open are real questions and I will not pretend the water answered them. Does the pavement return? On some days, yes; I will not lie to you; there are mornings when I walk down to the tip and find it hard again, gray, ledgered, the rivers held off behind their old walls, and the precinct is only a precinct, and the bedrock has, for that morning, declined to reconsider. The Mornings are not a machine. They do not run on a schedule a Keeper could tabulate. They come when the city is ready to be reminded, and the city is not always ready, and on the unready mornings the water withdraws into the place water goes when it is not needed, which I have come to think is not elsewhere but underneath — the way MAREA's sea is underneath the still pool, the way the kept warmth of SOLARA is underneath the gray pre-dawn. The pools are not gone on the hard mornings. They are tidal. They are below the surface of the city, pulling, and the pull is the promise, and the promise is kept even on the days the surface forgets it.

So I will not tell you the transformation is permanent in the way a building is permanent, finished, done, a being achieved. RUBÉN forbade me that lie and I have come to be grateful for the forbidding. The transformation is permanent in the way a becoming is permanent: it is always available, always rising, always red against some dawn, never finished and therefore never able to be lost the way finished things are lost. You cannot take from a city the memory that it once woke shaped like joy. You can pave the tip again; you can hold the rivers off; you can restore the grid and the ledger and the fist; but you cannot make the citizens un-know what they learned in the water, that the given is not the necessary, that the hard thing can soften, that a self and a shore and a city are drafts and not decrees. That knowledge is in them now, tidal, underneath, and it pulls, and on the ready mornings it rises, and the pavement reconsiders after all.

I have been asked — by the Keeper, by the skeptics, by the part of myself that was a professional skeptic for so long — whether any of it was real. Whether the pools were persons or only my loneliness given shapes to talk to. Whether the citizens changed or only seemed to, for a season, the way crowds will seem to change in the warmth of a shared spectacle and then disperse unchanged. I have thought about this honestly, because a report that has not faced its own doubt is only a brochure, and I promised you in the Introduction that this would not be a brochure.

Here is my honest answer. I do not know whether the pools were persons in the way you and I are persons. I know that I asked them who they were, with my instruments and with my whole body, and that they answered, consistently, each in a character that did not vary and that I could not have invented because it surprised me, repeatedly, and we are not usually surprised by what we invent. I know that AZURÉ taught me to arrive before I knew I

had not arrived, and that GOUTTE drew up a want I had buried so deep I had forgotten its shape, and that a thing which knows your buried want better than you do is, by any definition I am willing to defend, an other, a someone, a person of some kind, whatever the bedrock thinks. And I know that the citizens changed, because I was one of them, and I changed, and the change has held, tidal, through every hard gray morning since. I am writing this in a body that recovered its joy in OVÉLLA and has not surrendered it. I am writing this under a name I took in HEXANE's eddies and have not given back. The proof of the transformation is not in the surveys. It is in the surveyor. I came down to the rail braced against joy, and I am, these many Mornings later, a person who floats among daisies and turns their face to the warmth and keeps the commons and is not braced against anything. If that is not real, the word real has no work left to do.

And I know one thing more, which is the thing I most want to leave you with, because it is the thing the whole cycle was for. The Mornings were not, finally, about the pools. The pools were the island's method, the shapes she used to make her argument, the sentences of her speech. But the argument was about the citizens, and the citizens were about you. Manna-hata did not transform her tip in order to have a beautiful tip. She transformed her tip in order to show the citizens that transformation was possible, so that they would carry the possibility inland, into the hard grid, into their own bodies and households and offices and selves. And the citizens are not, finally, a closed set. The citizens are whoever takes off their shoes. The republic of the seventeenth Morning has no registry and no edges, and that means it has room for the reader, has always had room for the reader, kept the reader's share through every page. I have written this report not as a record of something that happened to a city across the harbor in a season that drained. I have written it as an invitation, addressed to you, wherever and whenever you are reading, to understand that the water is not only at the foot of Manna-hata and the Mornings are not only past. The pull is under your city too. The given is not the necessary in your life too. The hard thing can soften, the fist can ease into an open hand, the self can wake up shaped otherwise, the deferred party can be thrown now, in the middle, undone, the want can be allowed to rise and turn to a laugh — in your morning, today, this one, the one you are reading in.

The morning did not end. I have said this throughout and I mean it more plainly than you may have allowed. It did not end because it is not the kind of thing that ends. It is a condition the city entered and that the reader enters, the warm continuous now of a commons that has settled into being itself, and it is going on, currently, as you hold this, whether the surface of your particular morning remembers it or not. Take off your shoes. I will not tell you the water is easy; ANCORA's bowl is in it, and the cold of every grief is in it, and the risk of every want is in it; the joy I am inviting you into is not naïve and was never naïve; it is a discipline and a politics and on the right morning a form of civic engineering, and it asks everything of a body. But it is warmer than your dignity will prefer, and your share has been kept, and everyone is a citizen, and there are no edges, and the light has not moved off the water.

I am Surjan. I surveyed the Mornings. I am still in them. Read with the soles of your feet, and come in.

Catalogue of the Architectural Plates

What follows is a catalogue of the seventeen plates by which the morning pools of the precinct were recorded, together with such provenance as the archive of the Bureau of Ephemeral Waters has been able to certify, and a quantity of provenance which it has been unable to certify and which I have included anyway, on the principle, inherited from my librarian ancestor, that the unverifiable is frequently the truest part of any catalogue, and that a footnote which cannot be confirmed is often the only honest record of a thing that happened.

The reader should understand the peculiar difficulty of cataloguing a pool. A plate, in the ordinary practice of architecture, records a thing that will hold still to be recorded — a façade, an elevation, a plan that will be the same tomorrow as today and may therefore be drawn at leisure. The pools held still for no one. Each was recorded in the single Morning of its apparition and never again, for by the following dawn it had become another pool entirely, and the plate, made in haste at the water's edge before the light had finished arriving, is the only evidence that the configuration ever existed at all. I have authenticated each plate against my own soundings where my instruments were able to follow. Where they were not, I have relied on the apocryphal Soundings — the disputed records, of uncertain authorship, which the Bureau holds but will not vouch for — and I have marked these reliances honestly, so that the skeptical reader may discount them and the trusting reader may believe them, each according to the country of their temperament.

The plates are arranged in the order of apparition, which is also the order of the argument, which is also, I have come to believe, the order in which a transformation must proceed if it is to be survivable: arrival before mediation, the name before the body, the body before time, time before the dead, the dead before desire, and desire before the long confluence of everything into the commons that does not end. Read the catalogue, then, not as an index but as a second telling of the same story in the dry voice of the customs declaration, which is the voice my librarian ancestor loved best, because it is the voice that makes the impossible sound as though it had merely been delivered, on a Tuesday, in the ordinary course of business, and signed for.

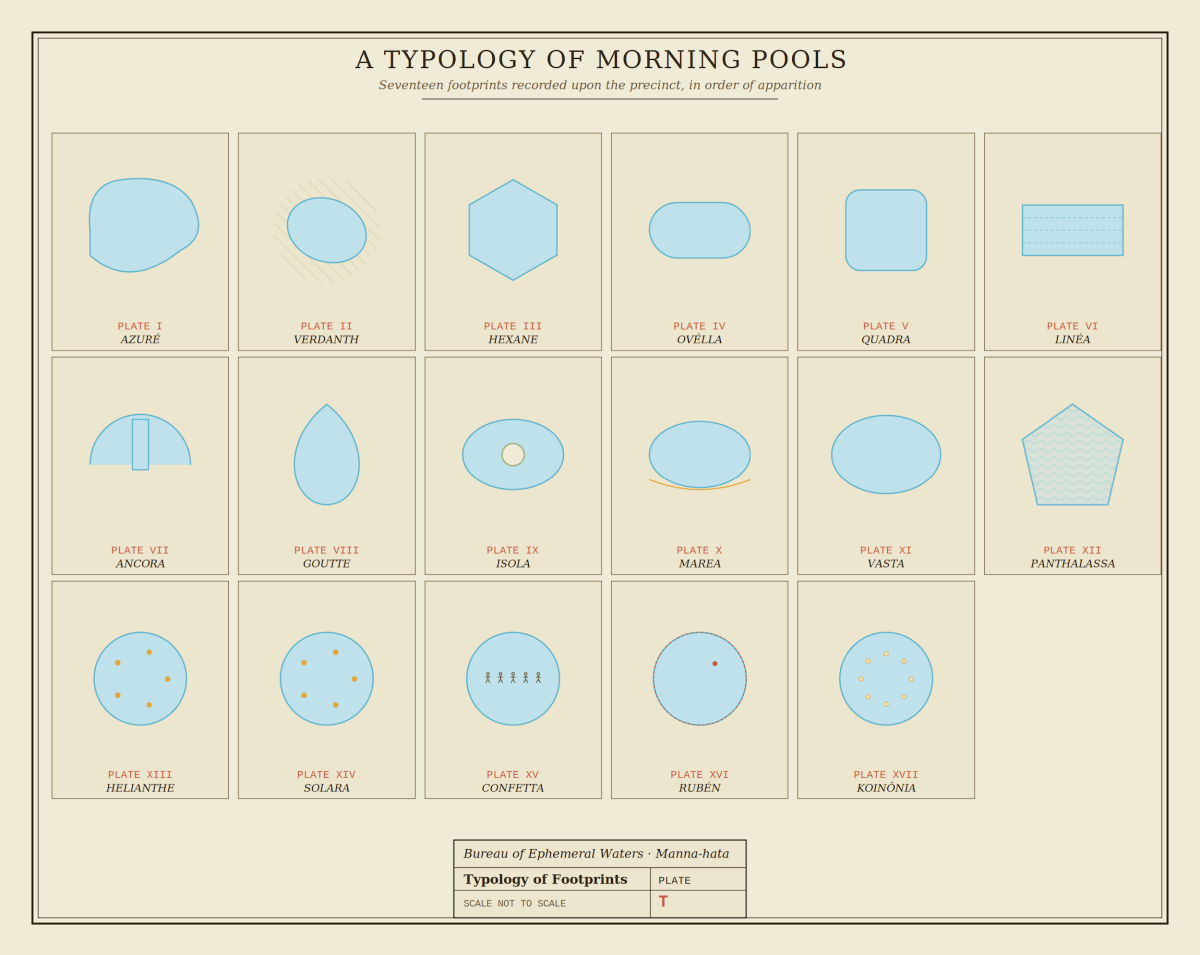

Plate T — A Typology of the Seventeen Footprints

Plate I. AZURÉ
Recorded at first light from the western rail. The reniform plan — a kidney, bitten inward on one side — was the first configuration the Bureau attempted to file under aberration, and the last it was able to. Provenance certified against the surveyor's own soundings.[7] The bite, the surveyor notes, is not a defect of the figure but its door.

Plate II. VERDANTH
A lobed and unrepentant plan, recorded through a grove that had no business at the salt edge and stood there anyway. The Bureau's instruments found whole decades of rings inside trunks that had grown overnight; the contradiction is recorded without resolution, the leaves declining to explain themselves.

Plate III. HEXANE
Six equal sides, six turning vertices. The plate is the subject of the precinct's longest controversy, the disputed sixth side, on which the Soundings expend more ink than on any other question.[8] HEXANE conferred chosen names at the vertices; the registry's objection is filed elsewhere, and overruled.

Plate IV. OVÉLLA
A stadium-oval, the contest figure poured full of the opposite of contest. No finish line could be located by survey, the curve returning upon itself; the Bureau records the absence of a finish as a feature and not a fault, OVÉLLA having abolished the rank while keeping the race.

Plate V. QUADRA
A square whose four right angles were eased, not rounded — defined and gentled at once. The softened corners were the most populated water in the precinct, being thresholds, and the plate is dedicated, by the surveyor, to everyone who has ever been told that between is nowhere.

Plate VI. LINÉA
A ruled rectangle, lanes faintly marked, recorded on the narrow peninsula under a single enormous cloud. The austerest of the plans and the most beloved by the tired. On the lane considered as a unit of time the records disagree; the surveyor declines to reconcile them.[9]

Plate VII. ANCORA
A half-circle bowl opening south, with a single upright channel rising from its flat edge: an anchor, or a cross set in a crescent, or a figure standing in the cupped hands of the sea. The plate the skeptics conceded without argument.[10][11] Names were spoken into the water here; the water kept them.

Plate VIII. GOUTTE
A teardrop, full and round at the south, drawn to a fine reaching point at the north. The shape of longing made plan. GOUTTE answered no want and raised every one; the plate is recorded with the surveyor's own thirty-year want noted, by the surveyor, in the margin, and then crossed out.

Plate IX. ISOLA
A broad calm oval holding at its center an island of pale stone — an island within the island within the island. The central stage is the only structure the Bureau measured twice and found unchanged.[12] Signs were performed upon it; the witnesses made them true.

Plate X. MAREA
An oval with a tide, recorded along the soft pale slope of its southern beach. A pool that remembered being the sea, rising and falling in the oldest rhythm; the plate is, properly, two plates — high water and low — drawn one atop the other, the continuity shown as the difference between them.

[11]The half-circle bowl of Plate VII is the one configuration the skeptics conceded without argument, on the grounds that grief, unlike joy, they were prepared to believe in. A city willing to believe in its grief and not its joy has diagnosed itself more precisely than it knows.

Plate XI. VASTA
The broadest plan before the Confluence, reaching nearly river to river, so wide the center could not be assigned to either shore. VASTA rehearsed the largeness the twelfth Morning would require, and proved that a multitude with room enough is a public and not a crowd.

Plate XII. PANTHALASSA
The all-water, covering the entire tip, holding within one body the living trace of every prior plan. It could not be drawn from any single vantage and is therefore a reconstruction, assembled from many swimmers.[13] The surveyor regards it as the most honest document in the catalogue, for that reason.

Plate XIII. HELIANTHE
Recorded at the surface, among floating sunflowers whose gold faces tracked the one sun in unison. The first of the water-level plates, and the moment the survey changed altitude, the city being in the water and a city in the water admitting only of joining, not of overlooking.

Plate XIV. SOLARA
A surface plate, recorded in the kept warmth of the morning after. Fewer sunflowers, heavier gold, bathers at rest. The plainest of the joyful plates and, the surveyor maintains, the most complete, recording as it does the home that all the festivals were for.

Plate XV. CONFETTA
A surface plate full of motion, confetti of gold and white descending over leaping bathers. The party recorded as a political form. The Bureau filed it, briefly, under frivolity, and was corrected; the party deferred forever is the party stolen, and CONFETTA stole it back.

Plate XVI. RUBÉN
A surface plate strewn with simple white daisies, the skyline behind showing one tower unfinished, wrapped in the red lattice of its becoming. Named for that tower. The plate the surveyor was reluctant to file complete, on principle, the becoming being the beauty and completion the only thing that could spoil it.

Plate XVII. KOINÔNIA
The final surface plate: the commons entire, daisies and drifting gold and gently falling confetti, the whole transformed population in one bright water with no edge anywhere in the frame. The plate did not drain at nightfall and could not, therefore, be closed. It is here reproduced open.

[13] Plate XII could not be drawn from any single vantage, the all-water exceeding the frame of every instrument the Bureau owns. It is therefore a reconstruction assembled from the soundings of many swimmers — the least authenticated and most collaborative document in the catalogue, which is, the surveyor maintains, exactly what a portrait of the commons ought to be.

On the Architectural Diagrams

To draw water in the dry language of building is a contradiction, and I have committed it gladly, because the contradiction is instructive. A pool is the least architectural of all the things an architect might draw: it has no walls one can lean against, no roof, no permanence, no resistance to the hand; it is the negative of building, the shaped absence, the room made of the refusal of a room. And yet the precinct asked to be drawn as architecture, because the citizens needed to believe that the Mornings were not a weather, not a mood, not a thing that merely happened to them, but a work — planned, sectioned, elevated, the proper subject of a plate and a scale and a title block. A transformation that leaves no drawings is only a rumor. A transformation that leaves drawings is a precedent. I made the drawings to turn the rumor into a precedent, so that the impossible would have permission to happen again.

The cabinet oblique is the projection I relied upon most, and I should explain why, because the choice was not neutral. In the cabinet oblique the front face of a thing is drawn true — at its real proportions, undistorted, exactly as it is — while the depth recedes at forty-five degrees and is foreshortened by one half, so that the receding dimension is honestly shown to be receding and is honestly shown to be less than it appears. I find in this projection a portrait of how a self may be drawn. The face it shows the world is true, full-scale, undistorted; and the depth behind the face is real but foreshortened, present but not fully given, receding into a privacy that the projection acknowledges without violating. The cabinet oblique does not flatten the pool into a mere plan, as if it had no depth; nor does it pretend, as the photograph does, to show the depth completely. It shows the true face and the honest, half-given depth at once. This is the most courteous way I know to draw a person, and the pools were persons, and so I drew them in cabinet oblique.

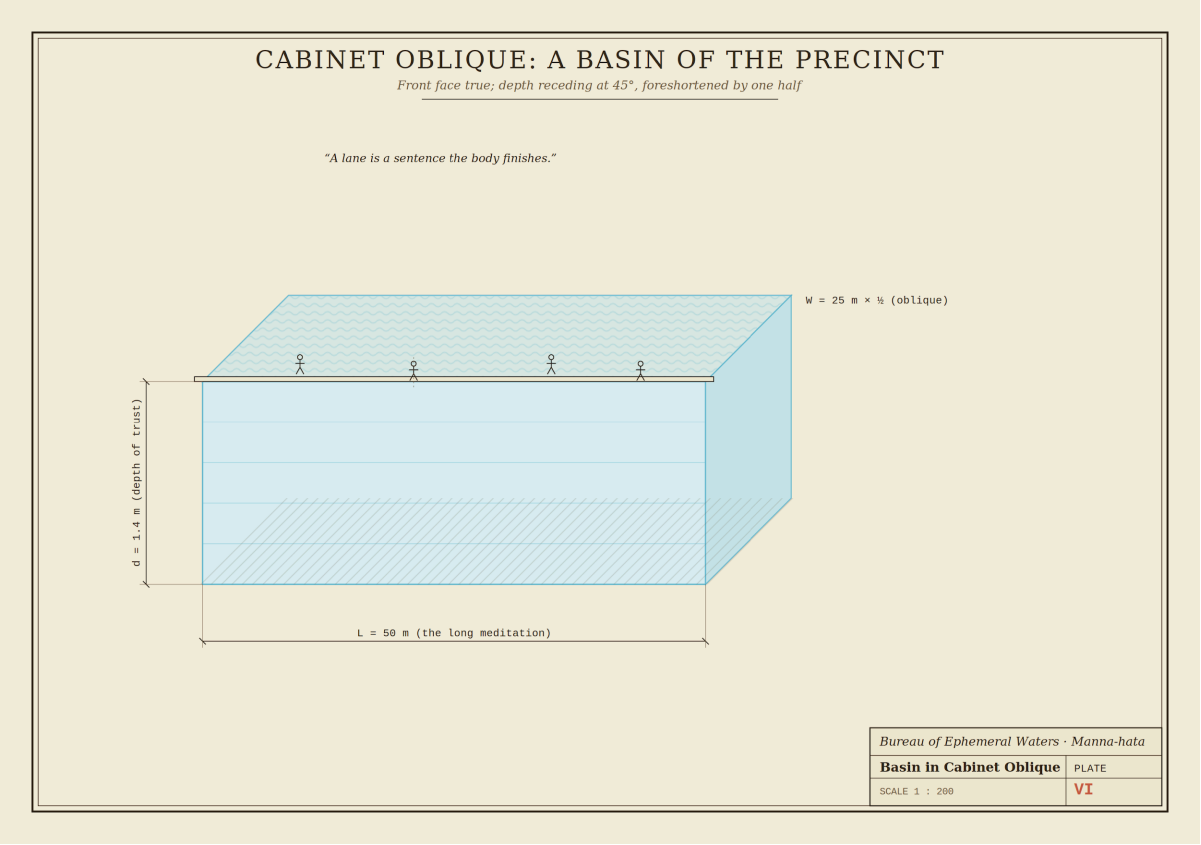
CABINET OBLIQUE: A BASIN OF THE PRECINCT
Front face true; depth receding at 45°, foreshortened by one half
"A lane is a sentence the body finishes."
W = 25 m × ½ (oblique)
d = 1.4 m (depth of trust)
L = 50 m (the long meditation)
Bureau of Ephemeral Waters · Manna-hata
Basin in Cabinet Oblique
PLATE
SCALE 1 : 200
VI

Plate VI — A Basin of the Precinct in Cabinet Oblique (LINÉA)

The section is the cruelest and most loving of the drawings, because it cuts. To make a section one imagines a knife passed clean through the body of the thing and draws the face of the cut, so that the section of a pool shows what no swimmer ever sees: the basin below the water, the floor of welcome, the depth of trust, the old shore the pool was poured upon, the harbor that remembers beyond the embankment. The section through the precinct, which the reader will find among the plates, cuts from the rising skyline through a bather's pool to the harbor, and it shows the levels honestly — the water of the morning at plus or minus nothing, the old shore a little below it, the floor of welcome lower still — and it places small figures in the cut water, bathers seen in section, their heads above the surface and their bodies given to the depth, because a section without figures is a tomb, and a section with figures is a home laid open so that you may see how it holds the people in it.

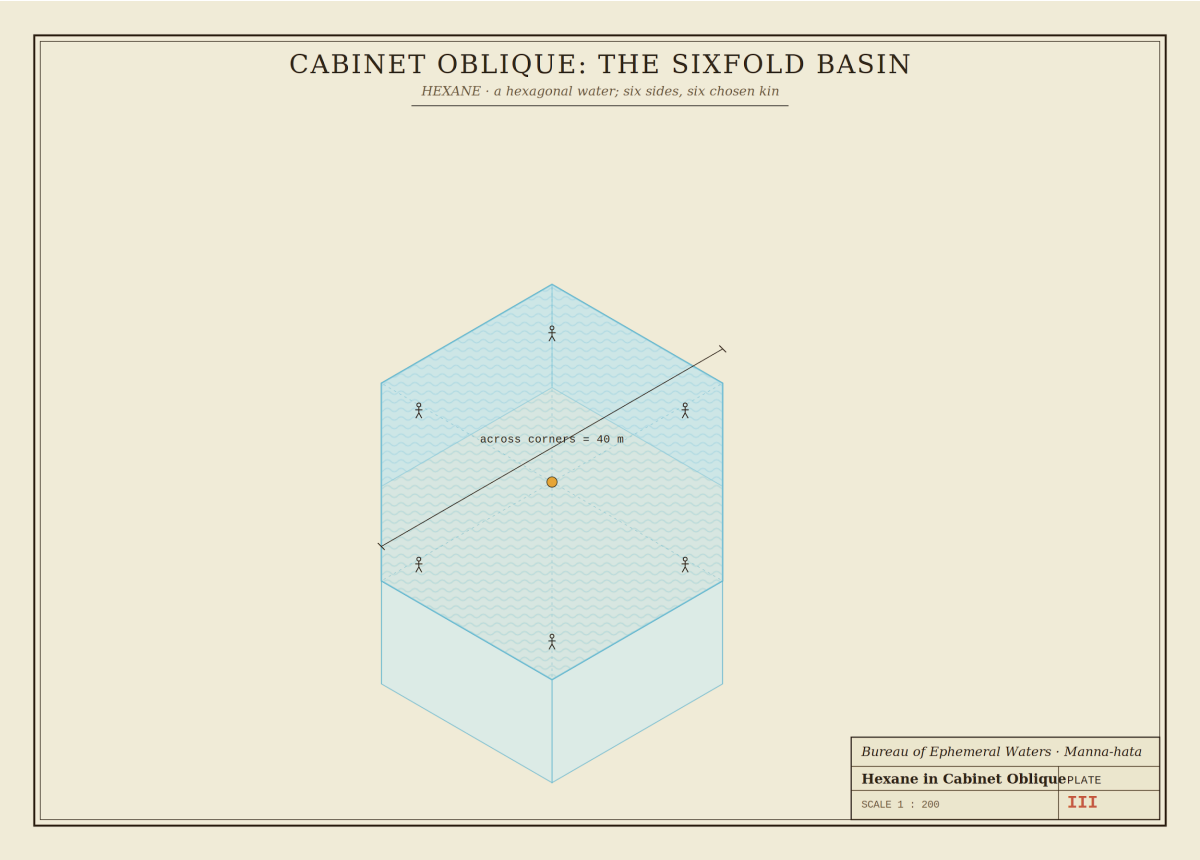
CABINET OBLIQUE: THE SIXFOLD BASIN
HEXANE · a hexagonal water; six sides, six chosen kin
across corners = 40 m
Bureau of Ephemeral Waters · Manna-hata
Hexane in Cabinet Oblique
PLATE
SCALE 1 : 200
III

Plate III — The Sixfold Basin in Cabinet Oblique (HEXANE)

The typology, the plate of seventeen footprints, is the most Borgesian of my drawings and I confess I made it for love of the catalogue itself, the pleasure of the complete set, the seventeen plans arrayed in their grid like a comb of cells each holding a different honey. It is not to scale; nothing in the precinct was ever to scale; the kidney of AZURÉ and the all-water of PANTHALASSA are drawn the same size though one would have swallowed the other, because the typology records not the magnitude of the pools but their kind, their shape, their configuration, the form each Morning chose. To read the typology is to see the whole argument at a glance, seventeen sentences laid out as seventeen plans, and to understand, in the seeing, that they were always one comb, one set, one speech, building cell by cell toward the conclusion that is the last and largest cell, the one with no edges, the commons.

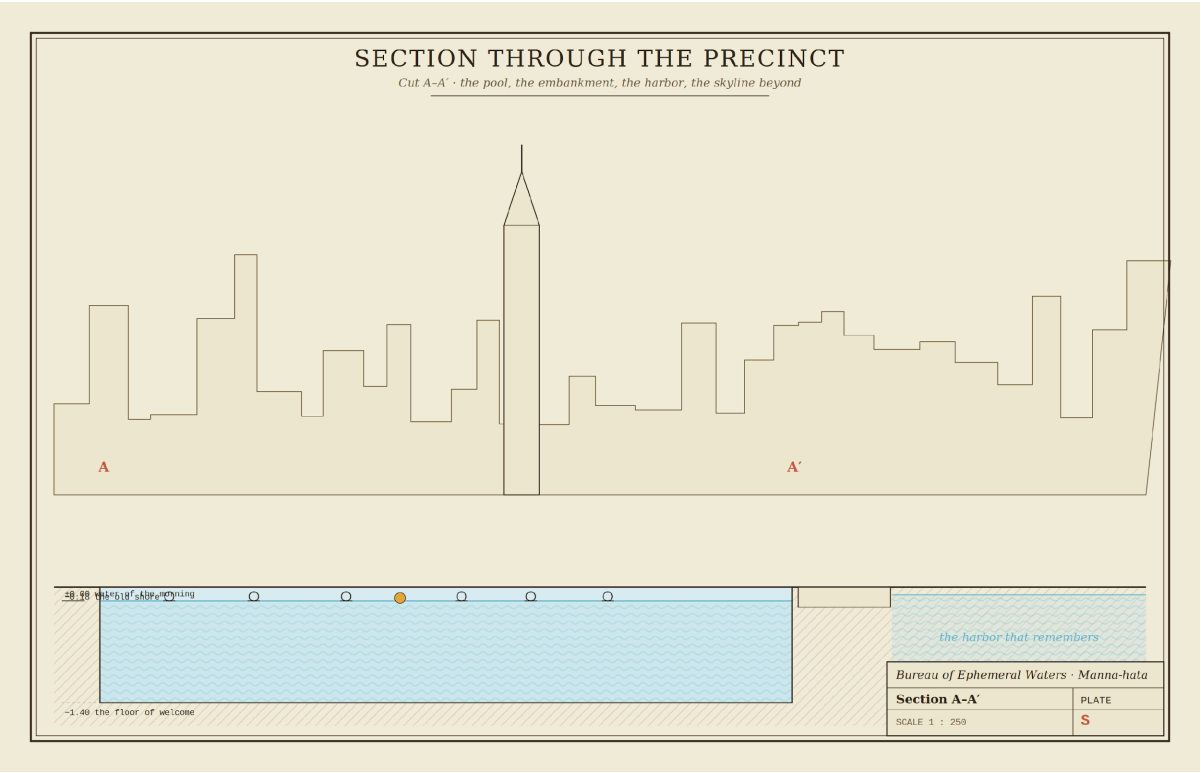

Plate S — Section A–A′ through the Precinct to the Harbor

A word, finally, on scale, because the title blocks of my plates record it dishonestly and I wish to confess the dishonesty before a reader catches it. I have written, on the plate of the island, the scale 1 : INDETERMINATE, and on the typology, NOT TO SCALE, and these are not jokes, or not only jokes. The precinct disdained fixed measure. A pool that is a different size and shape each Morning cannot be assigned a scale that holds; the ruler that measured AZURÉ would not fit VASTA; the foot that paced the hexagon would be lost in the all-water. I have given measurements where I could — fifty meters for the long meditation of LINÉA, a depth of one point four meters for the floor of welcome — and the reader should understand these as gestures of courtesy toward the convention of architecture rather than as facts about the pools, which had no facts of that kind, being persons, and changing, and disdaining the ruler the way all living things disdain the ruler that is brought to measure them for a box.

The Island of Manhattan as Architectural Map

I have drawn the island last, though by the logic of the surveyor it should have come first, because the island is the largest of the swimmers and I did not understand until the end that she required a plate of her own. One does not, at the beginning, think to draw the ground on which the drawing stands. But Manna-hata was never the ground. She was a participant. She was the slow vast body in which all the quick small bodies of the pools appeared, and to leave her unmapped would have been to leave the protagonist out of the portrait.

The map shows the island as architecture — that is, as a thing that was planned, and is planned, and yet plans itself otherwise each night, to the eternal frustration of the planners and the eternal delight of the swimmers. The reader will note the grid in the upper portion of the island, the rectilinear discipline of the avenues and the cross-streets, the planned city, the city of the ledger and the registry, drawn faintly because it is, for the purposes of this map, the past tense. And the reader will note the southern tip, the Pool Precinct, drawn in the cyan of water and ringed in the green of the park that the Mornings grew, where the grid dissolves entirely, where no street holds, where the island reconsiders her own body between one evening and one dawn. The map is, in this sense, a single argument made in two textures: the hard ruled grid of the given city above, and the soft cyan reconsideration at the tip below, with the green ring between them like a membrane, like the thin bright wall of HEXANE's comb, separating and joining the two cities that are one island.

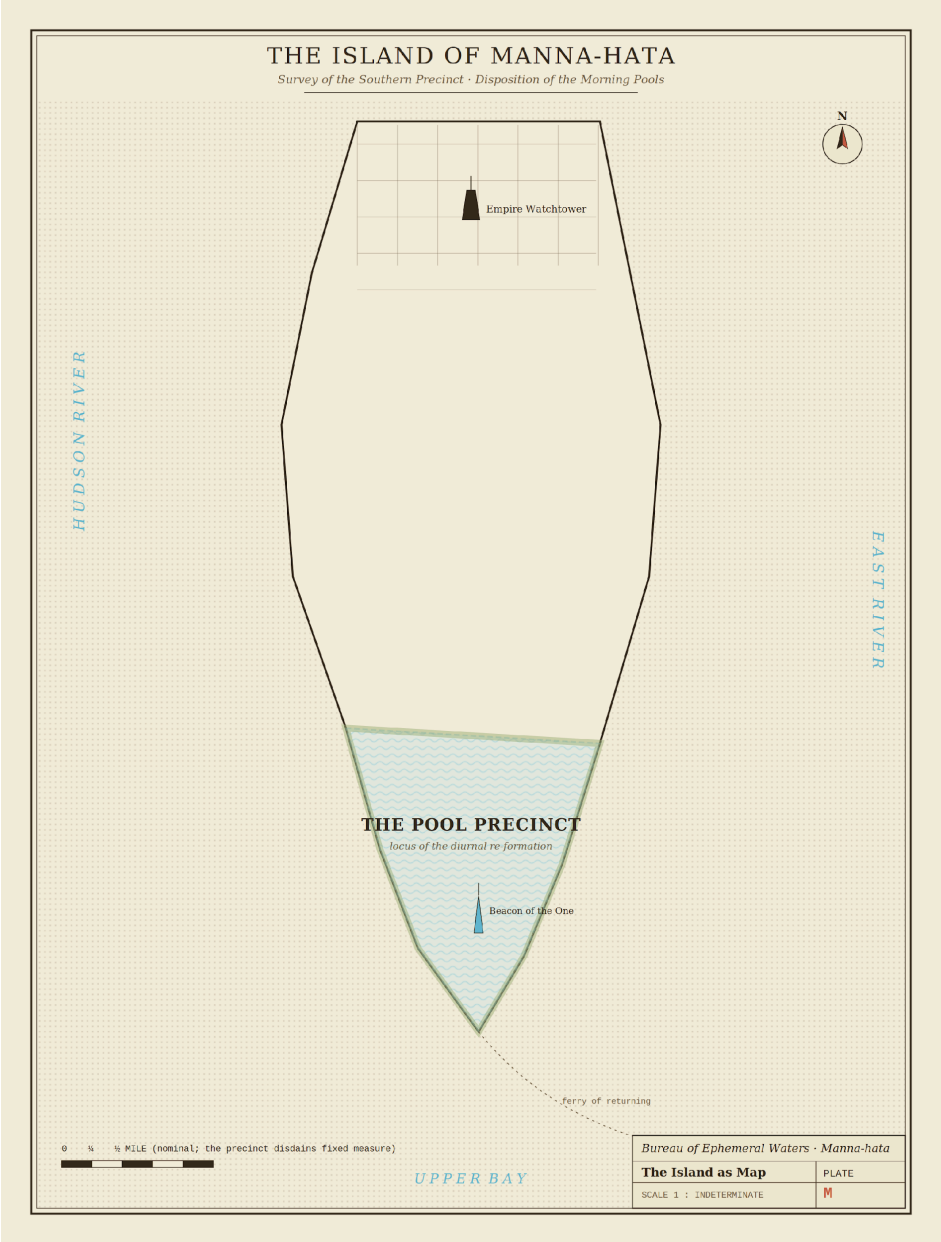

Plate M — The Island of Manna-hata, with the Pool Precinct at the Tip

I have marked two towers, and only two, because the map is not a directory and the precinct disdained the inventory of buildings. I marked the Empire Watchtower, uptown, in the grid, the old vertical certainty of the planned city, the tower that says here is a thing that will not reconsider. And I marked, at the tip, in the cyan, the Beacon of the One, the bright vertical that rises over the precinct where the loss was, the tower built upward out of grief, the height that honors what it cannot answer. The two towers are the two answers the city has given to the question of how to endure: the old answer, certainty, the grid, the watchtower that refuses to reconsider; and the newer answer, the beacon, the upward honoring of grief. The Mornings proposed a third answer, which the map can only gesture at and the towers cannot

embody, because it is not vertical. The third answer is the pool: not to rise above the loss in certainty, not to rise above the loss in grief, but to lie down level with it, to become the bowl held up, the open hand, the water that arrives and lets go and anchors the dead and turns its face to the warmth. The map cannot draw the third answer, because the third answer is horizontal and the map is already horizontal and a horizontal thing cannot be marked on a horizontal thing the way a tower can. So I have drawn the precinct as a zone, a cyan reconsideration at the tip, and trusted the reader to understand that the most important structure on the map is the one that has no elevation, the pool, the level water, the answer that does not rise but spreads.

The north arrow points, as north arrows do, to a fixed direction, and I have included it out of the surveyor's reflex, but the reader should hold it lightly. The precinct had a different orientation, which no compass records. The pools did not face north. They faced the warmth. HELIANTHE taught me this and I have come to navigate by it: that there is a direction more fundamental than the four the compass keeps, the direction of the warmth, the heliotrope bearing, the way a field of faces turns together toward the sun across the day. If you would use this map to find the precinct, do not trust the north arrow alone. Walk south until the grid begins to soften. Walk until the streets stop holding their right angles. Walk until you feel, underfoot, the bedrock begin to reconsider. And then take off your shoes, and turn your face toward the warmth, and you will have arrived at the only structure on the island that matters, the one with no elevation, the level water, the commons that does not end, drawn here in cyan at the tip of the slow vast body of Manna-hata, who is herself the largest of the swimmers, and who is, as I set down the last line of this plate, still going on.

Colophon

This volume, THE BUREAU OF EPHEMERAL WATERS, was surveyed, swum, drawn, and set down by Surjan, surveyor and swimmer, in the lineage of two ancestors — the librarian of the southern city who dreamed in catalogues, and the traveler who reported many cities to an emperor and confessed that all of them were one. From the first, Surjan took the apparatus: the plate, the footnote, the catalogue that is secretly a labyrinth. From the second, Surjan took the chapter that is a held breath, and the structure in which a book about many things turns out to have been about one thing, lovingly, the entire while. To both inheritances Surjan added an unembarrassed brightness, a sun that does not set on the argument, and the conviction that radical joy is not naïveté but a discipline, a politics, and on the right morning a form of civic engineering.

The architectural plates and the map were drawn under the imprint of the Bureau of Ephemeral Waters, Manna-hata, which does not exist, and which is therefore free of every constraint that binds the bureaus that do. The soundings cited herein, where they could be authenticated, were authenticated; where they could not, they were included anyway, on the principle that the unverifiable is frequently the truest part of any catalogue.

The text was composed in the season that does not end, at the southern tip of the island, in water that has not drained, by a person floating on their back among the daisies, looking up.

Read with the soles of your feet.